



National Economics Students Survey 2006 Report

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We also would like to thank Anastasia Ireland, who helps us do qualitative data analyses.

The report was prepared by Inna Pomorina and edited by Ros O'Leary with the support of the whole Economics Network team.

Executive Summary

In 2006, the Economics Network of the Higher Education Academy carried out its third survey of Economics students, covering both undergraduates and postgraduates. This is the executive summary of the report.

Purpose of the study

This national students survey was conducted online, as part of the Economics Network's ongoing research programme into teaching and learning in Economics. John Sloman and Inna Pomorina designed questions for the survey, which consisted of 2 sections (*About you* and *About your degree course*) and included 30 questions, both quantitative and qualitative. Students of Bristol University took part in a focus group and trial of the survey which helped to reformulate some questions.

The survey aimed to provide valuable information on students' perceptions of studying economics including identifying strengths and weaknesses in the learning and teaching of economics. Departments have used the results of previous surveys to inform curricula development.

Profile of survey respondents

Nearly two thousand students from sixty-nine departments took part in the survey, including both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Of the respondents:

- 55.5% are male and 44.5% are female;
- 82.1% started their courses under the age of 21;
- 72.7% state English as their first language;
- 63.9% have A-level in Maths;
- 59.2% have A-level in Economics;
- 81.2% state that Economics was their first choice;

The survey was intended as an observational study and not as a controlled experiment.

Methods of analysis

Students' responses to the quantitative survey questions are examined using standard statistical methods. Differences in responses are examined by gender, age of entry, year/level of study, A-level Economics, A-level Mathematics, English as first language and choice of course. Relationships that are statistically significant at the 0.05 levels are discussed. Responses to each of the qualitative questions are coded and aggregated for analyses using N-Vivo software. In the report, for illustrative purposes we include graphs, which are based on the codes, summarised in terms of their frequency and typical quotes from students' responses.

Responses to individual questions

Studying this degree course has met expectations for three quarters of respondents. When asked how the course differs from their expectations, students mentioned Maths and A-level Maths, course content and its relevance to the real world, level of teaching and support for students.

Respondents were asked to indicate how useful they found different types of teaching in supporting their learning. More than half rate as useful and very useful: lectures; small classes and seminars; assigned reading; materials posted by lecturer on the course's Virtual Learning Environment (VLEs), feedback on submitted work, working informally with other students, preparing for exams and tests. The less-used learning activities, that more than a third of respondents had not encountered, include workshops or classes (of over 25 students), group work projects, online learning using economics software, online questions and tests (not assessed) and communication tools in the course VLEs.

In seminars/tutorials/small classes, a vast majority go through pre-prepared problem sets or worksheets. At the same time more than 80% rarely or never have games, simulations or role-plays in seminars and nearly half rarely or never have individual student presentations.

Half of the respondents found the teaching of maths and stats on their course very good and mostly good, though about a third of them respond that some is good and some not so good.

A majority of respondents found the content of the degree largely relevant to the real world and the workload about right.

A majority found that the assessment on their degree accurately tests the level of their knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes. As part of coursework, assessment essays in the student's own time are frequently used by the majority of respondents, while among those rarely or never used are essays done in class (87.4%), online assessment (71.5%) and group work projects (47.7%).

The big majority of respondents (67.0%) study on a course that makes use of a VLEs. Almost all their comments either described VLEs positively or complained that they are underused.

Overall, about three quarters of respondents were satisfied with the quality of their degree course.

Students' comments to open-ended questions

Respondents identified as:

- *best aspects of the course:* quality of staff and lecturers, variety of modules to study, future job prospects;
- *most useful seminar activities:* going through pre-set problems or questions, discussions, group work and mini-lectures;
- *ways to improve seminar activities:* running seminars more frequently and interactively, making groups smaller and organising them according to the student's ability levels, as well as changing the content/structure of seminars and improving teaching;
- *ways to improve teaching maths and stats:* improving teaching methods, use of practice sets, taking into account previous knowledge and improving structure and content of the modules;

- *ways to improve assessment*: assessment should be more frequent and continuous, coursework can be assessed and exam weighting can be made clear, more essays should be used and better feedback given;
- *economics software and its usefulness*: 64.4% use the following economics software in their degree course and find it useful: Eviews (24.0%), STATA (19.5%), SPSS (14.3%), Win Econ (9.2%), Minitab, Microfit. However some students complain that not always enough explanations were provided;
- *effectiveness of VLEs*: an effective tool, but the overall opinion is that it is not utilised enough;
- *their future career*: in finance or finance-related services, economics, business or undecided;
- *skills they developed*: Interpersonal, Academic and Practical;
- *aspects of the course that they don't like*: the teaching methods of some lecturers, structure and content of the course, maths aspects and group sizes;
- *aspects that could be improved*: teaching methods, especially of GTAs, poor level of English language of some lecturers and GTAs, lack of feedback on students' work;
- *how the course has changed them*: better understanding of the wider world, clear career prospects, open their minds and changed them personally;
- *in 5 years time*: become managers in financial institutions and work in the City or develop a good career in any field. Some mention acquiring a well-paid job or working as an economist in a public or private institution;
- *any other comment*: many 'Thank you' replies for organising the survey, quality of questions asked and pursuit of better Economics education for future students.

Conclusions

We were impressed by the maturity of students' comments and by their awareness of teaching and learning issues in economics. Their reflections show that they not only learn modules necessarily for their degree but also in order to open their minds to a wider perspective of the world. Students appreciate their teachers' knowledge of the subject, but they'd like improvements in the areas of delivery, motivation and confident use of English language. Some of the things that students suggest require a lot of extra resources, like smaller class sizes and more contact time, while others could be achieved by relatively small changes in practice, which the Economics Network will be happy to support.

Appendices

Appendix I includes the Economics Network Student Questionnaire. Appendix II includes graphs for all statistically significant factors for quantitative questions. Appendix III describes two ways of coding the data that were used for qualitative questions.

Purpose of the study

Following the success of our 2002 and 2004 Students Survey and as part of our research programme into teaching and learning in Economics, the Economics Network has conducted its third national online Economics students survey in March-April 2006. The results of the Students Survey give us an inside view of what is really going on in teaching and learning of Economics in UK Higher Education. This survey is part of a comprehensive research programme, which aims to better understand the needs of our different stakeholders, including Students, Lecturers, Alumni and Employers.

However, the Student Survey is not only about information gathering. It also plays an important role in individual departmental planning and curriculum development – each participating department is provided with a confidential report with their own results. Many departments have used these results, for example in Programme Review and some departments have fed back that the responses from students in our survey are more considered and thoughtful than responses from institutional surveys (perhaps because students felt that our survey was more independent). Several departments have asked us to run workshops in the areas of teaching that students have identified to be in need of improvement. We see such action taken by departments as a very important part of their commitment to teaching and learning and would like to encourage them not only to discuss and reflect on their own confidential reports but also to identify areas for action.

We have changed the questions in the survey this year, as many of them were duplicating the ones included in the National Students Survey, which is offered annually to all undergraduate students in UK since 2005. The Economics Network's Advisory Group favoured of having a subject-specific qualitative students survey, that provides information on students' perceptions of studying Economics at various levels of study. John Sloman and Inna Pomorina designed the questions for the survey, which consisted of 2 sections (*About you* and *About your degree course*) and included 30 questions, both quantitative and qualitative (Appendix 1). All quantitative questions were mandatory, so in order to finish the survey students had to answer all of them, but open-ended questions were optional, which has affected the number of replies for each question. At least a third of the respondents answered all questions, with some questions answered by all respondents.

The survey included questions about course expectations and satisfaction with the course and perceptions of workload. Students rated the effectiveness of various forms of activities in supporting their learning. We asked them to identify the best one or two aspects of their degree, how often various activities are used in their small classes and to name one or two ways in which seminars could be improved. We asked about their opinions on various forms of assessment as well as whether students find that their assessment accurately tests the level of their knowledge and understanding.

Some questions dealt with the real-world relevance of courses and the teaching of mathematical content, as these were both the subjects of complaints from students in previous surveys. Some questions were about the possible use and effectiveness of technology, including Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) and other online learning. Final questions were focused on the possible career paths and the skills that the degree helped them to develop. Students of Bristol University took part in a pre-

survey focus group and trial of the survey which helped to reformulate some questions.

Nearly two thousand students from sixty nine departments took part in the survey, including both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Some of the departments which previously actively participated in the survey decided not to take part in it this year due to other commitments. Others have specifically limited the respondents to a certain year or level of study. There is big discrepancy in the number of replies from different departments, ranging from 151 respondents to below 10.

The survey was run online, as in previous years, though this time the Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) system (<http://www.survey.bristol.ac.uk/>) was used, which we previously tested for our Lecturers and Alumni Surveys.

The survey focuses on students' perceptions of studying Economics and not on any specific course or module. They are asked to think back over the time they spent at university and either to rate their agreement or disagreement on a 5 or 3 point scale with various statements regarding their learning experiences or to answer open-ended questions. This time besides asking students to assess the usefulness of various learning activities, we also gave them the possibility to rate activities as "Not available in my degree – N/A" and provide written comments. This was done due to the different availability of learning activities to students in different departments. For some forms of activities, that were not available to big group of students, we consider looking at the relative usefulness of this activity to them.

In order to ensure the validity of responses, students were asked to submit their e-mail addresses to participate in the prize draw and duplicate entries were excluded.

The survey was intended as an observational study and not as a controlled experiment. The respondents did not constitute a random sample of all Economics students in the UK, but a self-selected group. As a result, their views may not fully reflect the opinions of the entire student population. Despite the self-selection, there is evidence that the expressed attitudes represent more widely held student opinions. The survey covers a broad cross-section of both undergraduate and postgraduate Economics education.

The survey aimed to provide valuable information on students' perceptions of studying Economics including identifying strengths and weaknesses in the learning and teaching of economics. The main value of the survey lies in the long term, as the findings will be compared to the results of future surveys. No comparisons are made between different institutions, as there are too many variable factors to make such comparison meaningful. Similarities with the previous survey results are discussed.

Profile of survey respondents

A total of 1,930 students took part in the survey. These were full-time Economics students (1,823 undergraduates and 107 postgraduates) studying at UK universities. The demographics of the survey participants can be compared to those of the total Economics student population using data from the HESA publication, *Students in Higher Education Institutions in 2004/05* (<http://www.hesa.ac.uk/holisdocs/pubinfo/stud.htm>) and to the respondents of previous surveys.

Of our survey respondents 44.5% were female (Figure 1), (it was 41.3% in 2002 and 44.3% in 2004), while among Economics students in general this percentage is lower at 35.3%. The larger proportion of female respondents to our surveys than in the HESA data is consistent with the widely reported survey research findings (8) that females are more likely than males to answer questionnaires.

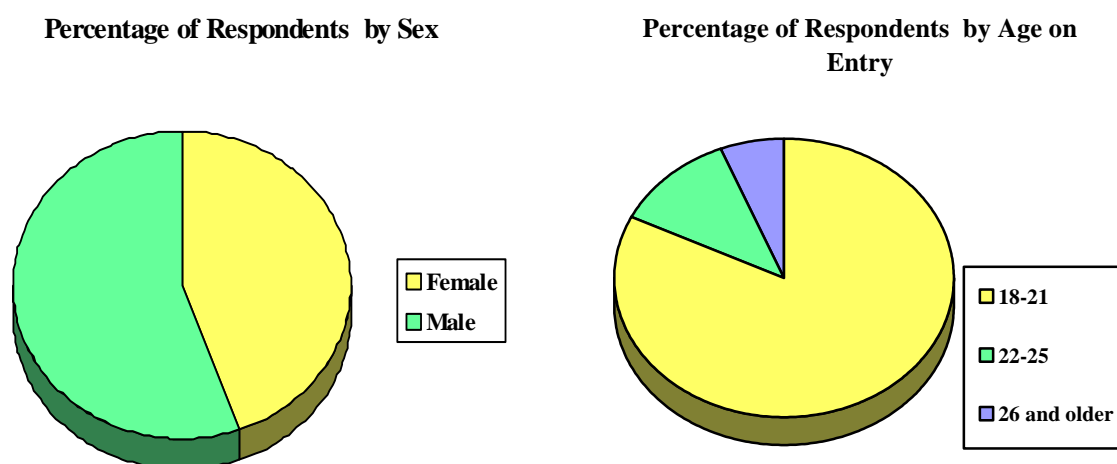


Figure 1 Characteristics of respondents: sex and age on degree entry

82.1% of survey participants were under the age of 21, similar to their proportion in the general population of Economics graduates (Figure 1) (it was 88.0% in 2002 and 86.5% in 2004). Students in the 22–25 age group were 11.8% and those older than 26 were 6.1%, which is the biggest group of mature students that ever took part in our survey. Age has become a statistically significant factor in respondents' replies to many questions. Unfortunately, mature students haven't left many comments, which could have explained more fully their perceptions. We are considering, if funds permit, to have focus groups or interviews with mature students in the future.

A question of year/level was included in the survey. Among the respondents 38.0% stated that they were in their first year, 26.8% in the second, 25.0% in the third, 4.7% in the fourth and 5.5% were postgraduates. In the previous surveys students were nearly equally divided between the years of undergraduate study. This year, due to the

other commitments of some departments the survey was distributed among their first year students only, hence the larger number of replies from the first year.

We included the question of English as first language in the survey, as it was an important variable that influences students' experiences in studying Economics. It may be not just the language knowledge itself, but also education background, as students for whom English was not first language could have school training different from those in UK. Among all the respondents English was a first language for 72.7% (it was 77.0% in 2002 and 63.5% in 2004) (see Figure 2). There are no national statistics regarding this question. The closest match is the domicile of students. According to HESA data, 62.4% of Economics students come from the United Kingdom and presumably have English as their first language.

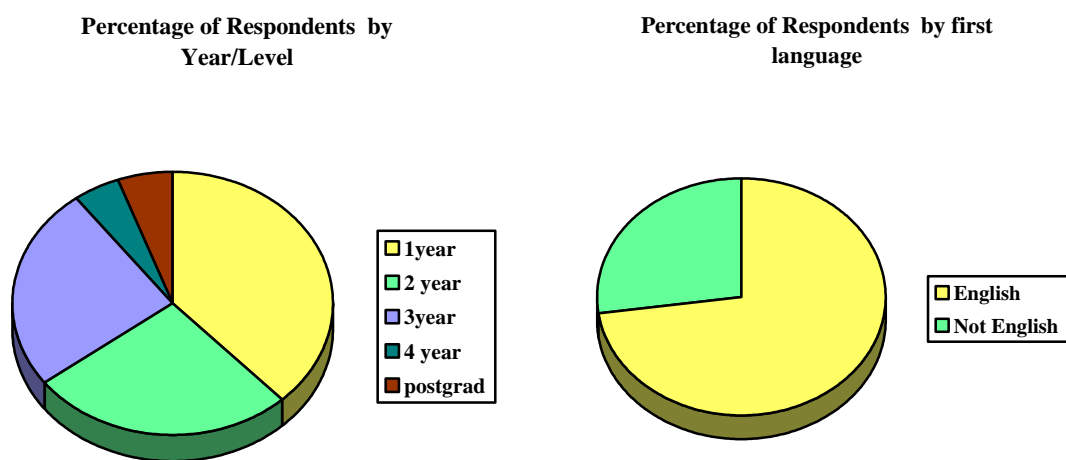


Figure 2 Characteristics of respondents: year/level and first language

Other factors that should be taken into consideration, when talking about students' experiences, are whether they have taken A-levels at school in Mathematics and/or Economics and whether taking this course were their first choice (see Figure 3).

The results were as follows: among all the respondents, 63.9% had an A-level in Maths, while 59.2% had an A-level in Economics (it was 64.7% and 62.7% in Maths and 62.3% and 63.1% in Economics respectively). As for the choice of the degree, 81.2% stated that Economics was their first choice (it was 77.4% and 78.5% in previous surveys).

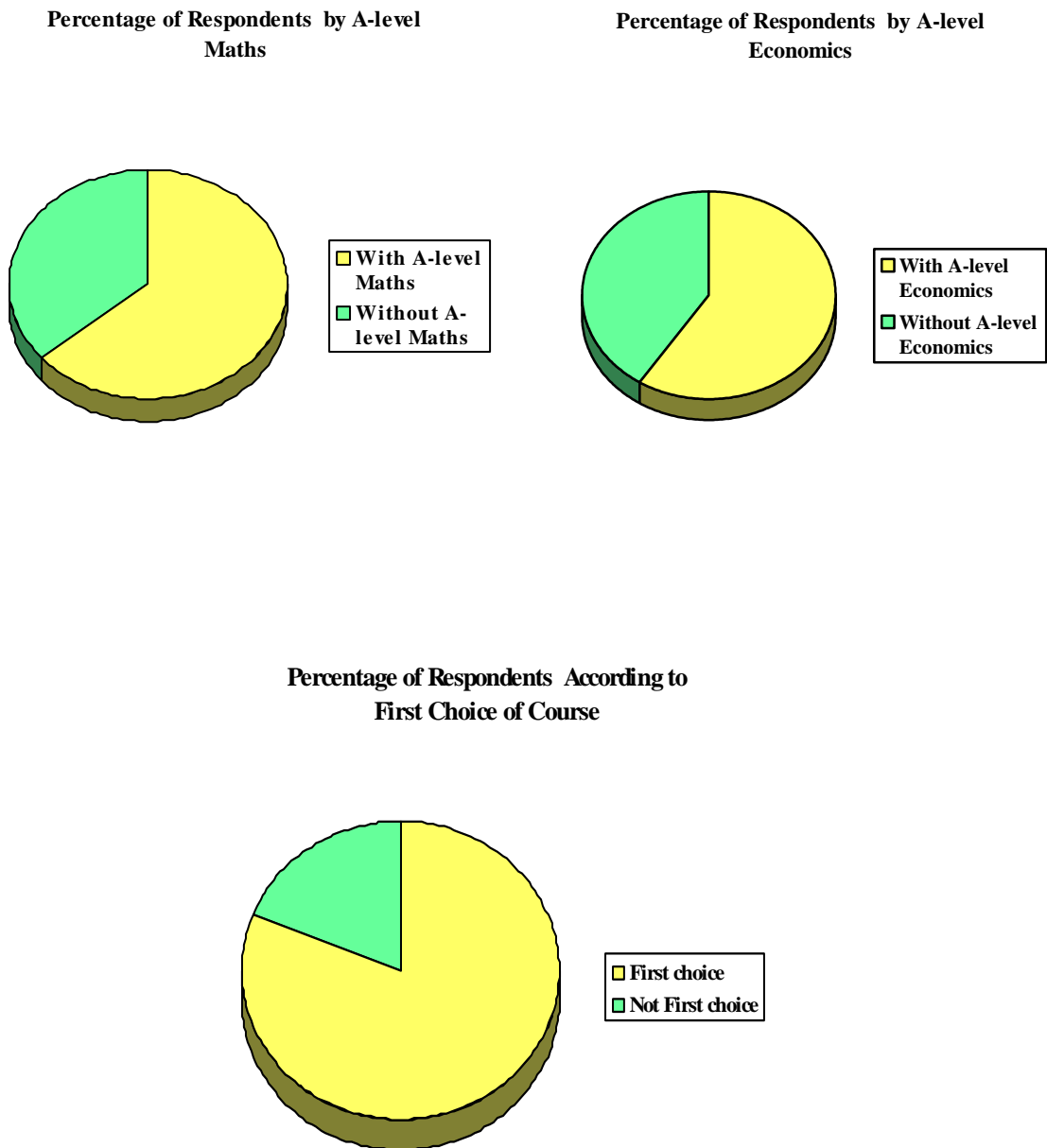


Figure 3 Characteristics of respondents: qualifications and choice of course

We appreciate that students' experiences vary according to the type of university they are attending. Universities have very different histories and resources to draw on. This is an interesting theme in its own right, and requires further investigation. It was not, however, considered as part of this survey.

We also have not included in the survey questions regarding the facilities provided by the universities. Although various facilities, especially library and computing services, are very important to students' perception of learning, they form a separate category and are usually surveyed centrally by the universities themselves.

Students overall assessment

Our respondents were dominantly male, aged from 18 to 21, with A-levels in Maths and Economics, with English as their first language and Economics being their first choice of course. Studying this degree course has met expectations for three quarters of respondents. When asked how the course differs from their expectations, students mentioned Maths and A-level Maths, course content and its relevance to the real world, level of teaching and support for students.

Respondents were asked to indicate how useful they found different types of teaching in supporting their learning. More than half rate as useful and very useful: lectures; small classes and seminars; assigned reading; materials posted by lecturer on the course's Virtual Learning Environment (VLEs), feedback on submitted work, working informally with other students, preparing for exams and tests. The less-used learning activities, that more than a third of respondents had not encountered, include workshops or classes (of over 25 students), group work projects, online learning using economics software, online questions and tests (not assessed) and communication tools in the course VLE.

In seminars/tutorials/small classes, a vast majority go through pre-prepared problem sets or worksheets. At the same time more than 80% rarely or never have games, simulations, role-play in seminars and nearly half rarely or never have individual student presentations.

Half of the respondents found the teaching of Maths and stats on their course very good and mostly good, though about a third of them responded that some is good and some not so good.

A majority of respondents found the content of the degree largely relevant to the real world and the workload about right.

A majority found that the assessment on their degree accurately tests the level of their knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes. Respondents reported that they are frequently assessed by essays in their own time, while the following are rarely or never used: essays done in class (87.4%), online assessment (71.5%) and group work projects (47.7%).

The majority of respondents (67.0%) study on a course that makes use of a VLEs. Almost all their comments either described VLEs positively or complained that they are underused.

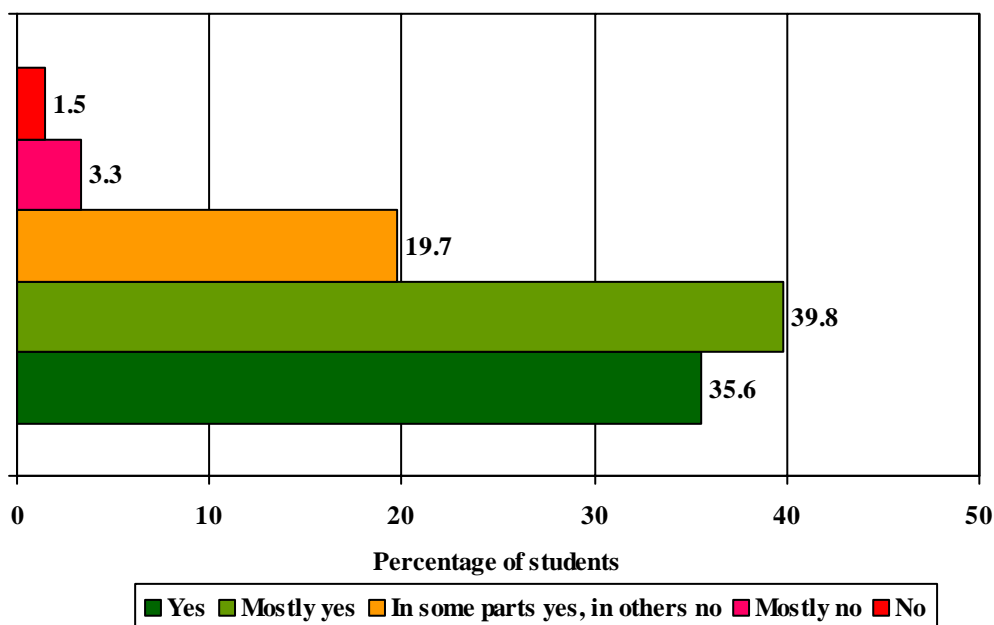
Overall, about three quarters of respondents were satisfied with the quality of their degree course.

Unless specifically mentioned, in this report the term "Most useful" is used for both "Very useful" and "Useful" answers and the term "Least useful" for "Of some use" and "Of little use" answers. Students' responses to the quantitative survey questions have been examined using standard statistical methods. Differences in responses have been considered in respect to gender, age on entry, year/level of study, A-level Economics, A-level Mathematics, English as first language and choice of the course. Relationships that are statistically significant at the 0.05 levels are discussed. The report includes graphs of the percentage frequency of students' replies, while Appendix II includes graphs for all statistically significant factors for quantitative questions.

Responses to each of the qualitative questions are coded and aggregated for analyses using N-Vivo software. We are grateful to Anastasia Ireland for her help in coding students' answers. Two ways of coding the data that were used in this survey are described in Appendix III. In the report for illustrative purposes we included graphs, which are based on the codes, summarised in terms of their frequency, and typical quotes from students' responses.

Responses to individual questions

Q 12. Has studying this degree course met your expectations?



Students were asked about their expectations of the whole degree course. As data shows for more than three quarters (75.4%) of the respondents the degree course has met their expectations. This figure was much lower in the previous surveys – 58.5% in 2002 and 55.1% in 2004. At the same time for every fifth of the students their expectations were met in some parts, and in others not met. There were differences in the responses due to age, first language, first choice and whether students have A-levels in Maths.

Mature students, who started their degree course at the age of 26 and older and who may have given more thought to the selection of their degree course, gave more positive replies to the question: 43.6% of them answer “Yes”, compared to 35.1% of those from the age group 18–21 and 22–25. At the same time a quarter of students from the age group 22–25 replied that the degree has met their expectations in some parts and in some parts not. This is a bigger group with this type of replies, compared to the replies received from both the 18–21 group (18.8%) and the 26 and older group (20.5%).

Those for whom English is not their first language replied differently than Native English speakers. Non-Native English speakers gave a less positive reply: 30.7% of

them answered “Yes” to the question and 24.5% of them replied “In some parts yes, in others no” , while among Native English speakers the numbers are 37.5% and 17.9% respectively.

Students, who have A-level in Maths were more positive in their answers, than those, who didn't: 78.0% answer “Yes” and “Mostly yes” , compared to 70.9%.

This difference in replies was even more dramatic for students who have chosen Economics as their first choice compared to those who has other subject as first choice: 78.1% and 64.7% answered “Yes” and “Mostly yes” respectively

We asked students who didn't answer positively to this question to explain in what ways the course differed from their expectations.

Q12a. If you didn't answer yes, please explain in what ways it differs from your expectations

There were 903 replies to this question. Among the main themes highlighted, judging by the number of times this issue was mentioned, were Maths and A-level Maths, course content and its relevance to the real world, level of teaching and support for students.

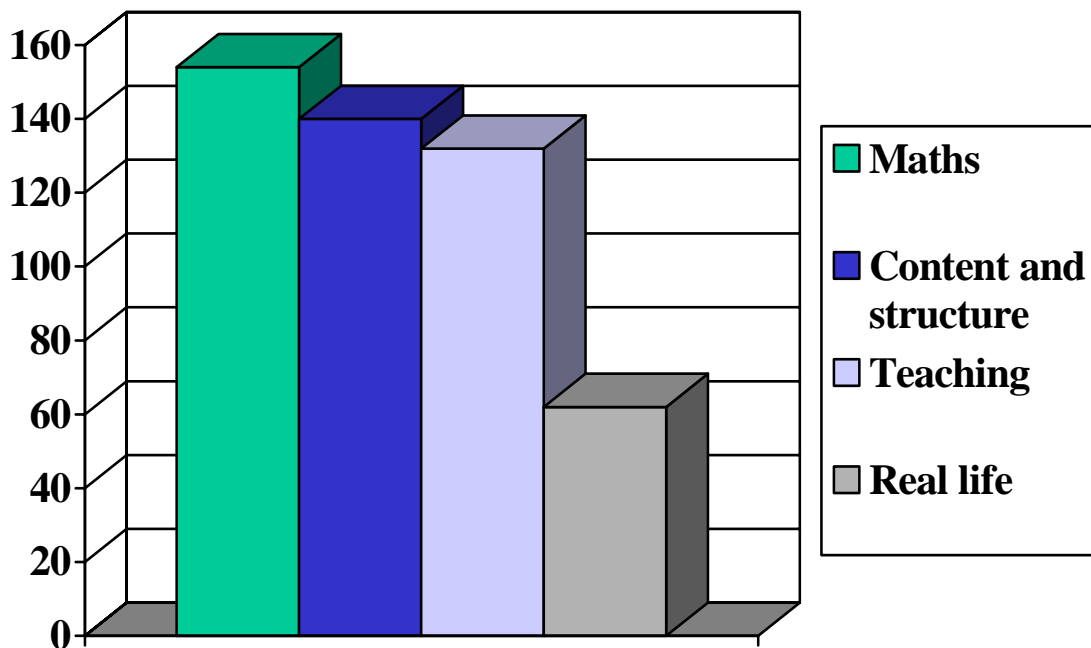


Figure 4 Coded responses to Question 12a

Responses from those with A-level Maths or Economics differ sharply to those from respondents without these A-levels.

Depending on institution where they study, some of those with A-level in Economics consider the course to be repetitive of A-level and the workload to be much lighter than they expected and commented on the course as “not demanding and boring.” “When studying for my A-level I thoroughly enjoyed my subject, however since

attending the university course I feel that my knowledge of the subject has not increased whatsoever.” “First year is very similar to the A-Level so there isn't much work for people who have done it already.”

Those without A-level Maths or Economics, on the contrary did not expect as much Maths on the course; some students even stress that they were not informed about the level of Maths by the prospectus or during the University Open Day: “The level of Maths involved in the course was grossly understated in the information available when applying through UCAS. This has led to myself and many of my fellow students to be at a major disadvantage to others who, whilst no better at understanding and using economic theory, have a greater background in mathematics.”; “There is a big difference between A level Econs and degree level especially with respect to the amount of Maths involved. My expectations were based on my experiences at A levels which did not indicate the true nature of Economics at university.” “A lot more Maths than expected”- was a frequent comment.

Students expected the content of the course to be less theoretical and more relevant to the real world. Among the typical comments: “The course isn't applied enough to real life situations.”; “At times, too abstract. Not enough relevant case studies for Microeconomics.” “Theoretical teaching, not much insight into practical aspects in Economics.”; “I am missing the international dimension in the course and how Economics can be applied to practice.” As a result many students “do not feel as economists”.

Some of the students seem to be confused about the overall course structure, as they did not expect to study a particular subject for their degrees. “The course and some units weren't quite what I expected”.

Students from some universities also expected the department to be more attentive to them and improve the overall organisation of the department. They also expected more support and contact time from the teachers and better quality of teaching. “I feel let down in the way the course was described to me. There is little or no help available, especially in the first and second year and it's all very impersonal;” “Teaching quality is not as good as I expected.”; “The teaching standards of the course was not as high as I thought when I decided to study Economics. Many of my peers and myself believe that our first and second year modules were taught poorly, particularly the seminars, which were taught by PhD students that spoke poor English and could not communicate well with the class. The majority of lecturers were also not supportive and rarely spared time in their office hours.”

Other issues frequently mentioned by students include the language problem and large lecture sizes as things that were not expected by the students. “I don't want to sound racist but some of the foreign lecturers are quite hard to understand and their grammar isn't great.”

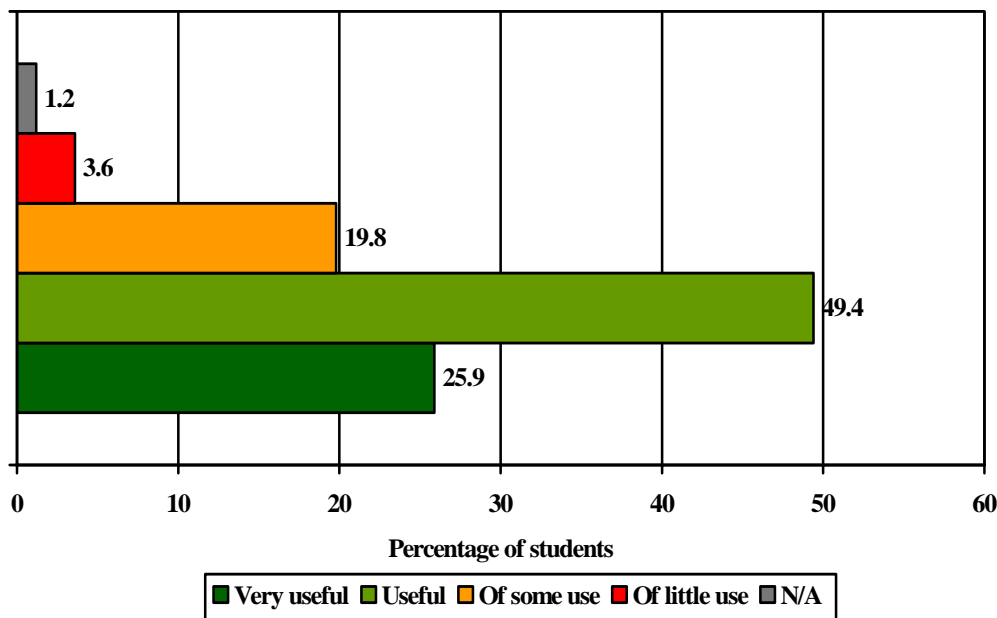
Students were also expecting to be more challenged in their degree and have heavier workloads: “Expected the work load to be more than what I am receiving and the topics we are covering are easier than expected as well;” “Being foreign, I was surprised at how much studying at this university reminds me of being in school in the way lectures are arranged and attendance is monitored. First and second-year Economics courses were, in my opinion, too easy and could have been comprised into one year;” “Difficulty of subject material is different from expected. First year much time was spent just re-doing A Level material. Increasingly this year material is so

theoretical that it could never be applied to the real-world – so one has to ask is there any point in learning it? Work levels are below what was expected.”

Q13 Please indicate how useful you have found each of these in supporting your learning

We asked students to assess how various existing teaching practices support their learning. Teaching practices included: lectures, small classes or seminars (up to 20 students), workshops or classes (over 25 students), lecture office hours or clinics or one-to-one tutorials, assigned reading, other reading, group work projects, set preparatory work for seminars, essays, online learning using the Web, online learning using Economics software, online questions and tests (not assessed), materials posted by lecturer on course VLEs or website, communication tools in course VLEs, feedback on submitted work, preparing for exams and/or tests, working informally with other students. Each teaching practice was rated as “Very useful”, “Useful”, “Of some use”, “Of little use”, “N/A – do not have this in my degree”. Respondents were also offered to leave their comments about each type of practice. As teaching practice is different in each year of study year/level of study, we anticipated that it will come as a statistically significant factor for all types of practices and it did. The rest of the dependent variables were also statistically significant for one or more of the questions. Their analyses will allow us to provide better-targeted support to the departments.

Q13.a. Lectures

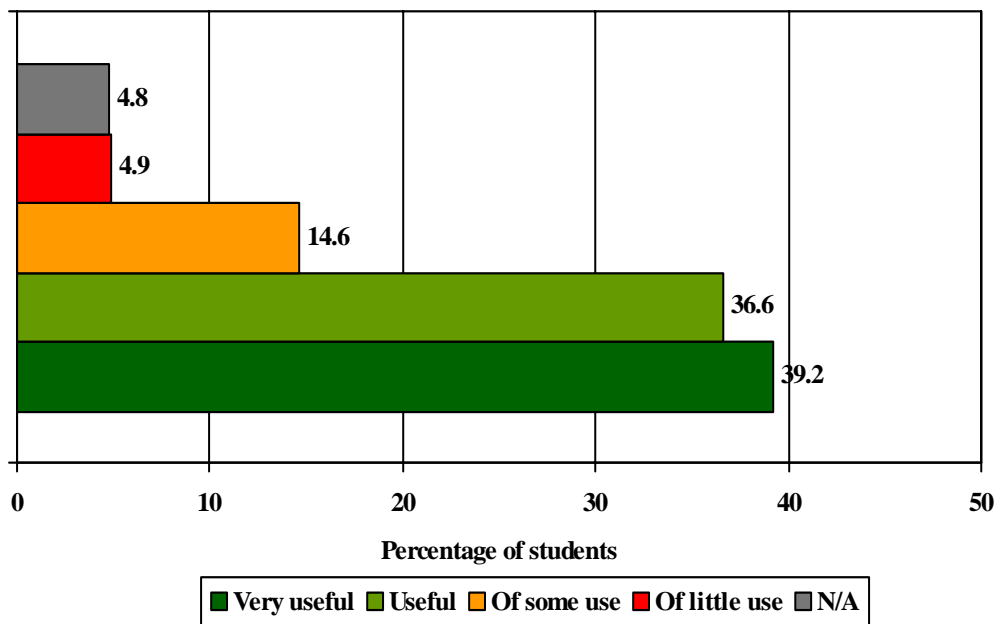


More than three quarters (75.3%) of the respondents find their lectures “Useful” and “Very useful”. There are differences in the responses due to gender, age, first language and year of studies. More of the females find lectures useful than males – 78.6% and 72.8% respectively. Among the students of the oldest group 26 and older more than two fifth (43.6%) find lectures “Very useful”. At the same time a quarter of

students from the middle group of 22–25 find lectures only of some use. Students, for whom English was not their first language, were more positive about lectures, than non-Native English speakers – 76.7% and 72.1%. As for the year/level of study most positive about lectures were students of the fourth year – 83.3% find them useful, and the least positive – students of the first year – 71.9%.

In their comments students stress that the usefulness of a lecture to them depended very much on the qualities of a lecturer: “Depending on the lecturer- some very useful, but few are useless”; “First year was utterly useless (or at least did not fit with tutorial work); finals lectures were excellent for macroeconomics, poorer for micro”; “Greatly depends on lecturers. I have had some very useful, and others utterly hopeless;” “In my Economics Principles and Applications Module the lectures do not have a clear structure and the slides are very difficult to understand. Maths and Statistics lectures very useful”; “Some lecturers are very good, but some lectures are very vague. Some VERY useful and interesting others so VERY VERY boring and unapproachable (and its not just me who thinks that!).”; “Some very useful, some of little use varied hugely – two particular lecturers I found very hard to understand as they had thick accents.”

Q13.b. Small classes or seminars (up to 20 students)



Similar to lectures more than three quarters of respondents (75.8%) find small class teaching “Useful” and “Very useful”. There are differences in the responses due to age, year of studies, whether they have A-level Maths and whether it was their first choice.

Second year students were most positive about small classes – 80.9%, while postgraduates were the least positive – only 67.3% of them find small classes useful.

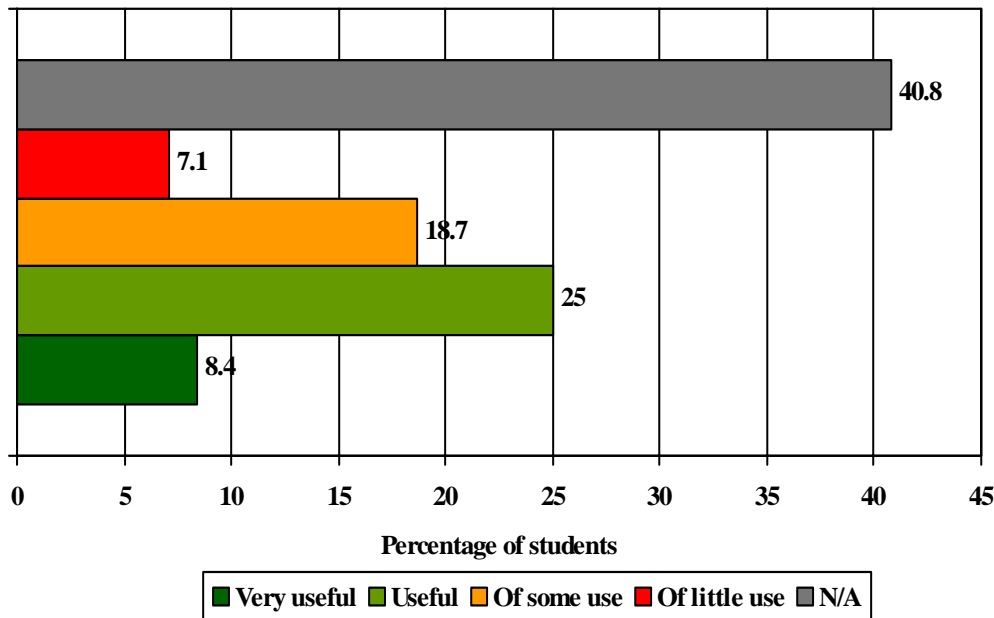
Older students were the least likely to find small classes useful – just 68.4% of the 26 or older compared to 78.5% of the 22 –25 year olds.

If Economics was students' first choice for the degree they were more likely to find small classes "Very useful", comparing to others with different first choice: 41.0% versus 33.3%.

Students, who didn't have A-level in Maths find small classes less useful, than those who have: 23.3% of them agreed that small classes are "Of some use" or "Of little use", compared to 17.9% of the latter.

Students' comments about small classes could be roughly divided into 2 groups: one group was genuinely positive about that activity and their only regrets were that they didn't have enough of them: "Where I got these they were very useful"; "There were not enough of these included." Students from the second group were negative about the way small classes were conducted: "Of little use: Many of the tutors struggle to articulate what they need to tell us."; "Of some use: Tutors can be poor."

Q13.c. Workshops or classes (over 25 students)



It was quite surprising to see that more than two fifths of respondents don't have workshops or classes with over 25 students. Among those who have workshops, views on the usefulness of this form of teaching varied, with the majority of 33.4% finding them useful, while 25.8% reporting only "some" or "little" use in them.

There were differences in students' opinions due to their gender, age, first language, A-level Maths and first choice of degree.

Workshops were unavailable to more than half of first year students, but only to 21.1% of the fourth year students. Students of the second year form the biggest group that find workshops useful – 40.3%.

Students of 22–25 age groups were more likely to find workshops useful – 39.0% of them did, compared to 32.2% of the 18–22 age group and 35.1% of the 26 and older age group.

Students with first choice in Economics find workshops less useful for learning, than those, for whom it wasn't first choice – 32.6% versus 38.4%.

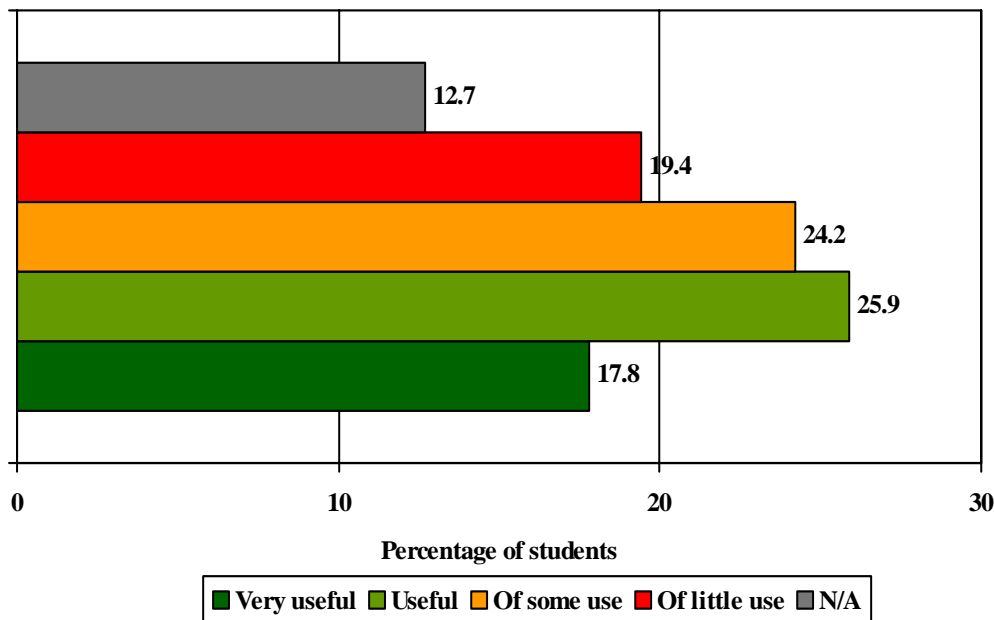
Workshops were more useful to students with A-level Maths, than for those without: 35.9% and 29.3% respectively.

More males than females find workshops of little use: 9.3% versus 4.5%.

Fewer students with English as first language find workshops useful than students for whom it wasn't first language – 31.5% compared to 38.9%.

In their remarks some students write, that even though such big classes were available to them they didn't attend them (“Are available but don't go.”), while others stress, that as in the cases of lecturers and small group teaching, the usefulness of big classes depends on the quality of teaching – “Sometimes very useful, but quality varies and some were very poor.”

Q13.d. Lecturers office hours or clinics or one-to-one tutorials



Less than half of all students (43.7%) find lecturers' office hours, clinics or one-to-one tutorials useful. Nearly one fifth of the respondents find them of little use and 12.7% don't have this option available to them, which is rather alarming.

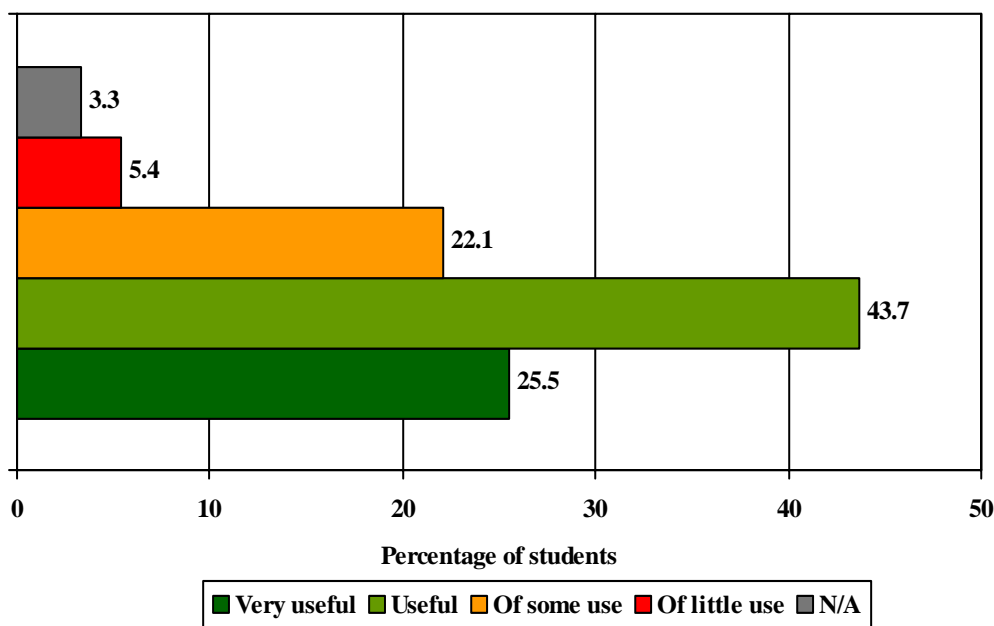
There are differences in students' perceptions of its usefulness for learning due to year of study, age and A-levels in Economics. Students of the third and fourth year are the ones that find them most useful: 52.8% (3d year), 58.9% (forth year), while students of the first year – less useful – 35.1%.

Half of the students of 22–25 age groups find it most useful, compared to 43.0% of 18–21 and 43.6% of 26 and older age groups, while this option was unavailable to 25.6% of the older group of students, compared to 10.2% of 18–21 year olds and 11.4% of 22–25 year olds.

Lecturers office hours was seen as of little use to more students who have A-levels in Economics, than to those students who didn't – 21.4% and 17.7% respectfully.

Comments left by students could be divided into two groups: first group is left by those who still haven't used this teaching practice – “Available, but haven't tried yet”, “Have not really taken advantage of this, even though it is extensively offered”. The second group of comments are left by students who have negative experience with it due to a limited offered time:” Lecturers have very limited office hours (mostly 1 hour per week, with a queue)”; “Many of my lecturers simply don't give you time outside of lectures and I have only had a one to one tutor in my 3rd year “; “10 minutes is not enough for asking questions. We are not allowed to book more than 10 minutes in the same week”; “Of little use: Time available for lecturers to see students was minimal”; “Office Hours not suitable to part time students”; “PhD student run helpdesk – very unhelpful, often those running them struggle with the questions themselves”; “Useful, but difficult to get in, because lecturers have too many students in that one hour”.

Q13.e. Assigned reading



More than two thirds of respondents find assigned reading useful to their learning.

There were differences in students' perceptions due to their year of study, age and gender.

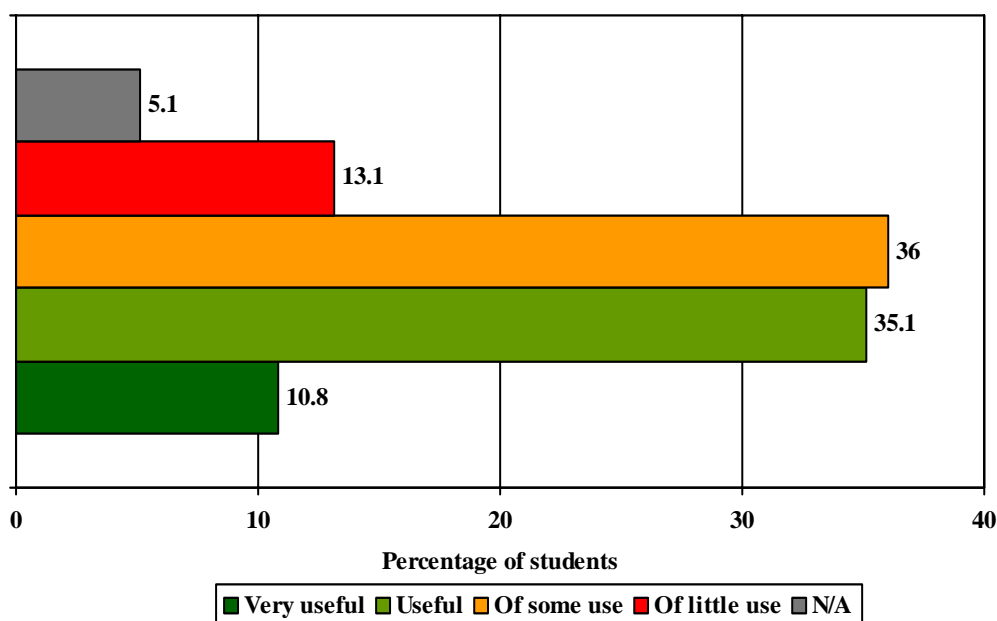
Females find it more useful, than males – 83.2% versus 66.1%.

Older students were also more positive than younger students in answering this question – 35.0% of 26 and older students find it “Very useful” compared to 24.6% of 18–21 year olds and 27.6% of 22–25 year olds.

Students of the fourth year were most positive about it, while first year were the least positive – 85.5% and 65.5% respectfully.

In their comments students stress that usefulness of assigned reading list depends on the subject and on the lengths of the list: “Depends upon the subject and whether a book (useful) or journal (generally not).”; “Too much, never be able to do enough”; “Often seemed excessive amounts required”; “Often too much or too little and not weighted to module”; “Most of them are very useful; so I cant say that readings are not helpful, but it would be much better to make the lists shorter so that I don’t have to spend time searching for proper ones out of the list.” Students also complain about the cost of books and their availability from the library: “Can’t afford the books.”; “Very well reading material is either unavailable or convoluted.”

Q13.f. Other reading



Although the respond to this question in general is positive (nearly half of the respondents found it useful) the biggest group of respondents (36.0%) has found this type of learning only “Of some use”.

There were differences in students’ answers due to their year of study, first language and age.

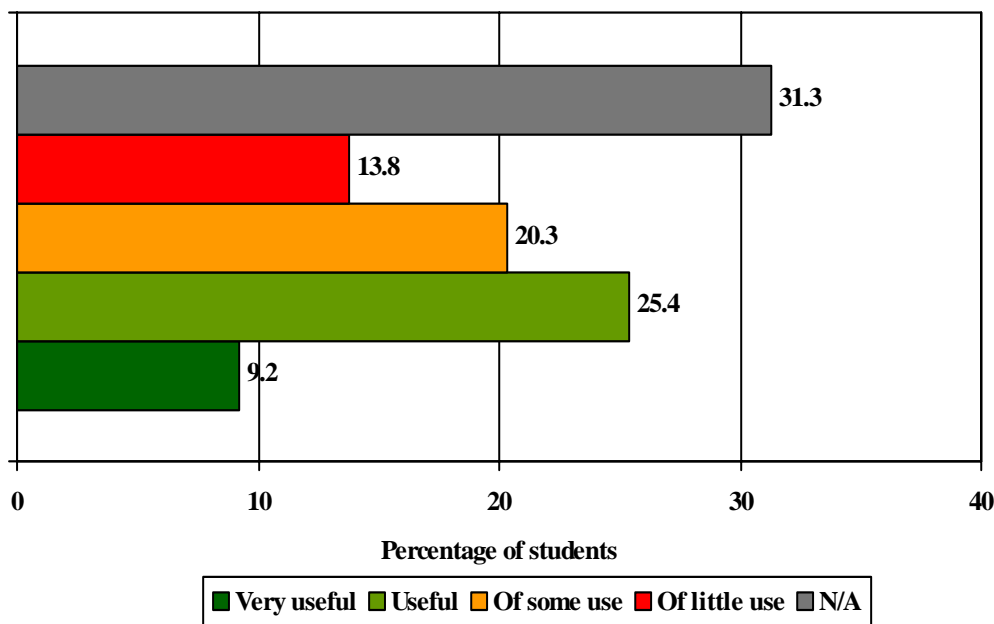
Most positive responses come from the fourth year students and postgraduates – 62.3% and 50.4% respectively, who tend to use it more in their studies. It was not offered to 7.2% of first year students. First year students were also the least positive about it – only 43.3% of them find other reading useful.

Students with first language other than English were more positive in answering this question: 47.8% of them find it useful, compared to 45.2% of Native English speakers, while 7.0% of them said that this option was not available to them, compared to 4.1% of Native English speakers.

Also older students have a more positive attitude towards other reading: 64.1% of students aged 26 and older find it useful, compared to 43.6% of the 18–21 years group and 52.6% of 22–25 year olds.

Among the students comments ‘time’ was given as the main reason for not using other reading: “Don’t have time.”; “Seldom do, really too much to read and too little time.”; “Only using core textbook rarely had time to do it. “; “Useful, but usually I don't have time to read even interesting material, I only read 'other readings' if I write a work on that or prepare a presentation.” Some of the students mention that they were not given any other reading – “Was not required extra reading.”; or again complain of the price of books – “Can't afford the books.”

Q13.g. Group work projects



Group work projects were not used in many degrees, as nearly a third of the respondents reply that it was not available to them. At the same time more than half of those who use group work in their learning find it useful.

There were differences in respondents’ attitudes due to their year of study, age, A-level Economics and first choice.

First year students and postgraduates were the least likely to be offered group projects with 38.1% and 44.9% of them finding group work unavailable. At the same time, more than half of respondents from these year groups who were offered group work projects in their degree find it useful. Second, third and fourth year students have more access to group work projects, but they were relatively less positive about it (48.0% of them find it relatively useful, compared to 56.1% of postgraduates).

Students who didn’t have A-levels in Economics were more positive about group work than those who has A-levels in this subject: 35.5% versus 34.1%, even though it was unavailable to the bigger group of them (32.5% didn’t have it, compared to 29.2% of those who have A-level Economics).

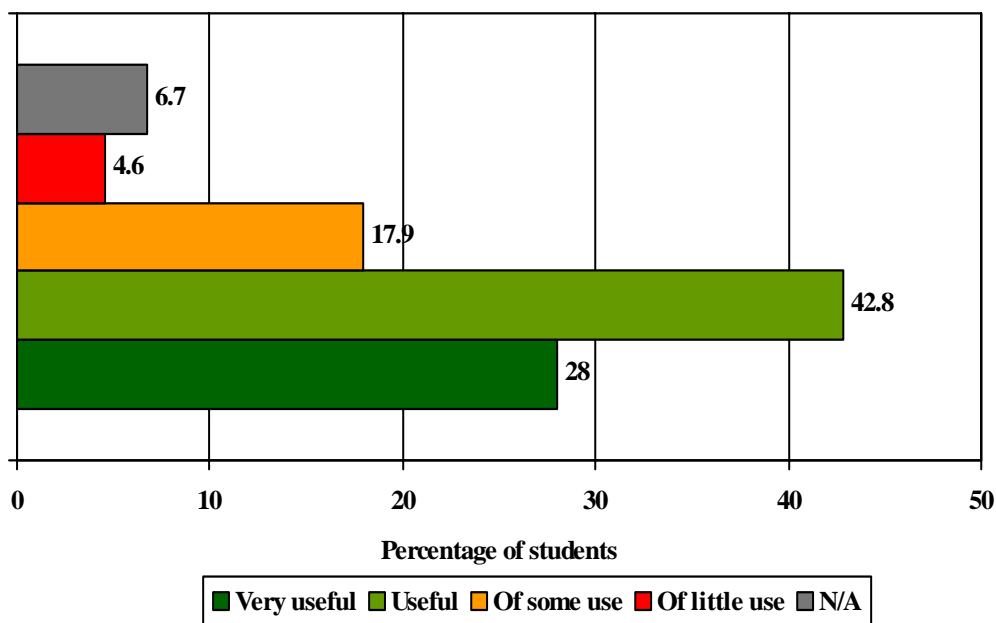
Similarly, students with first choice in Economics were less positive about group work than students for whom Economics wasn’t first choice: 33.6% of the first ones were positive, compared to 39.8% of the last ones.

It seems that group work is more popular with the students without prior learning in Economics.

In their comments students stress both pros and cons of group work: “Briefing notes were excellent idea.”; “Can be good, but often group members are not equally committed.”; “Depended on the group's willingness to work.”; “Irrelevant – it is there to meet vocational rather than learning needs.”; “It depends on group members. I got lazy people in my group, so it is not helpful at all to improve team working skills.”;

“Of some use: too much free rider tendencies”; “I had some in other modules I took outside of Economics and found them to be extremely useful”; “ In the absence of tutorials or seminars these would have been very useful”; “Would like more!”

Q13.h. Set preparatory work for seminars (e.g. problem sets)



A big majority of 70.8% of students find this type of learning useful, although it was not available to 6.7% of respondents.

There were differences in students’ answers due to their year of study, first language, age and A-levels in Maths.

Students of the second and fourth year were among those who find set preparatory work for seminars most useful: 75.2% and 81.1% respectively, while it was less popular with first and third year students: 18.0% and 20.5% of them find this kind of learning of little use.

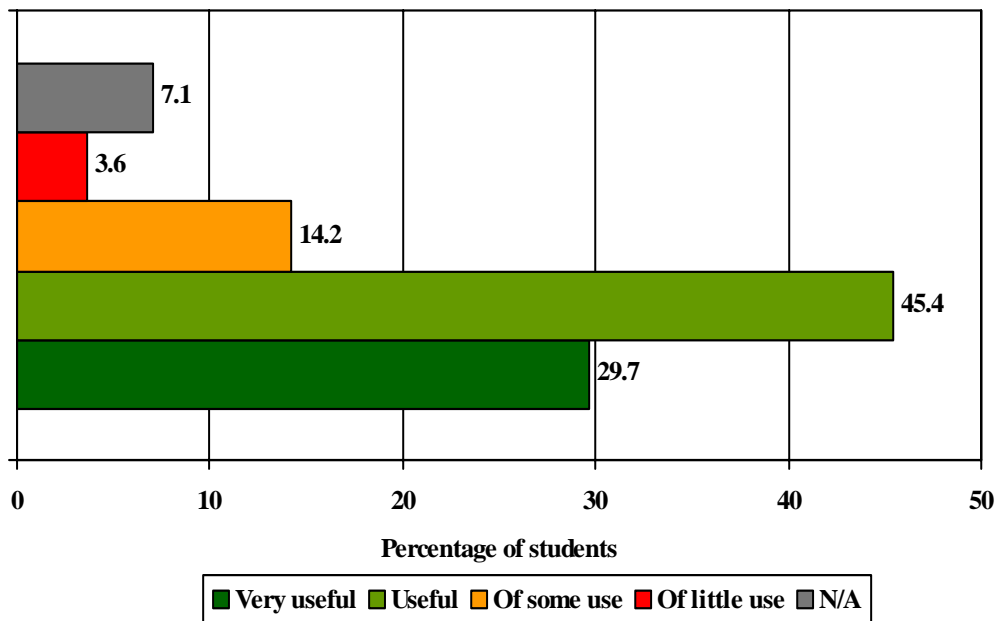
Mature respondents, who started their degree course when they were 26 or older, find this type of learning less available to them – 20.6% said that it wasn’t available, compared to 5.4% of 18–21 year olds and 7.0% of 22–25 year olds. That is why, even though the absolute numbers of them were less happy with this type of learning, than their younger colleagues – only 61.5% of them find it useful, relatively they are more positive about it than any other group – 77.4% of those to whom it was available find it useful. Reasons for these differences in availability of problem sets to mature students are unclear and require further investigation.

Those, with A-level Maths were more positive than those who don't: 73.7% and 65.8% respectively find it useful.

Students with English as a first language were less positive about set preparatory work, than the rest: 23.4% of them find it of some and little use, compared to 20.5%.

In their remarks students mostly mention differences of usefulness due to the module, difficulty of problem sets and time constrains: "Depends on the particular course."; "Sometimes too difficult"; "Rarely had time."

Q13.i. Essays



More than three quarters of respondents find essays useful.

There were differences in students' answers due to their year of study and age.

More than 91.1% of fourth year students find essays useful, while this number is down for the first year students – 70.7% and postgraduates – 59.8%. Due to the fact that it was not available to 23.4% of postgraduates, it was found relatively useful by 77.4% of postgraduates and 77.1% of first year students.

It remains less available to 19.7% of 26 and older respondents, compared to 5.1% of 18–21 year olds and 11.4% of 22–25 year olds. This last group was the least positive about essays – 20.6% of them find it of some or little use, compared to 12.9% of 26 and older and 18.1% of 18–21 year olds.

In their comments many students complained that essays were either not available to them or that the feedback was not given – "Don't think I've had to write an Economics essay over the 3 years!" "Often feedback is lacking or late."; "Not very helpful: the department does not offer feedback on essays, rather removing the point of them"; "Economics doesn't have enough non-assessed essays to give us practice."

Students suggest “We should be evaluated more on how we can improve on essays that have been handed in.”; “More essays – essays require much mandatory research which is far more beneficial in gaining wider understanding than revising notes for mid term tests.”; “More essays and homework would be good.”

Other comments were about difficulties in writing essays, as many students haven’t practiced writing them for some time: “A little bit intimidating considering I hadn’t written any since GCSE’s”.

Q13.j. – 13.n. Online learning

The next five questions were dedicated to various types of online learning. There are many similarities in the way students’ answers these group of questions.

Many forms of online learning are still unavailable to big groups of students: thus every fifth respondent didn’t have online learning using the Web available and two fifth of respondents didn’t have online learning using Economics software and online questions and tests (not assessed) available.

Use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) is spread more widely: only less than one in ten respondents didn’t have materials posted by lecturer on course VLEs or website.

At the same time VLEs are not used interactively: communication tools (e.g. discussion board) are not available to every third respondent.

More than half of those who have these forms of online learning available to them find them useful, with the exemption of communication tools in course VLEs, where the majority of 38.9% find it of some or little use.

Among the factors that affected students’ replies were year of study, age and gender, choice of degree and first language. Some of these differences could be explained by the preferences of a lecturer or a department in using particular types of online learning for a particular course (year of study), some by the gender preferences in the use of online learning (other studies support this result (<http://sole.ilrt.bris.ac.uk/findings.html>)). Those differences though being statistically significant are not very big in absolute terms. However the differences in availability of ‘Online learning using the web’ and ‘Materials posted by lecturer on VLEs’ to the mature students of 26 and older are nearly as twice as much as for the rest of the age groups and demands further investigation. Unfortunately this group of students hasn’t provided many additional comments that could clarify this issue. Among the submitted ones – “My problem was mostly with access to it, due to not living on campus and not having broadband internet at home.”; “Some news could be made much more clear and more materials should be put to use.”; “As I am a part time student, I often need to travel for work. I would really like to be able to attend my lectures via the web.”; “I can’t use it.”

Potentially these striking differences in the results could be caused by the following:

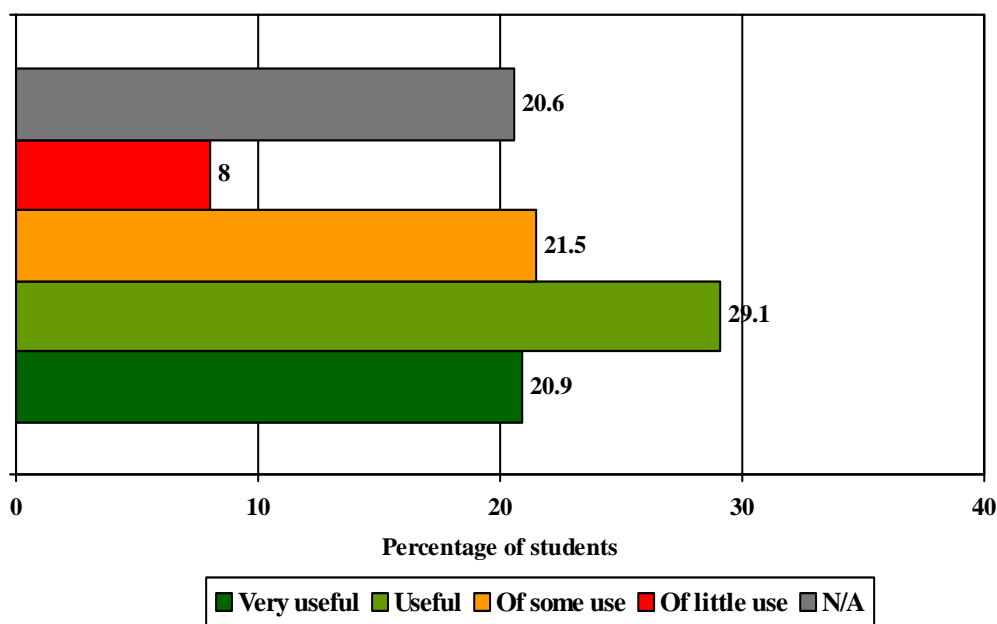
A. Availability of computers – many mature students live off-campus and thus lack the access to the computers on-site; some of them may have families and other material obligations and don’t own a computer; a majority of them also work to support themselves and their families and may not necessarily have a computer at work or time to use it for study.

B. Confidence in the use of computers, which may be due to lack of access. Many mature students with less experience than their younger counterparts, might lack computer skills and confidence in the use of online materials, they are not so called “digital natives” (3). Materials may be posted on a VLEs or departmental website and are available to students if they know where to look for it, but if they are not computer literate they won’t be aware of these resources.

Departments ought to consider whether this affects the learning possibilities of their mature students. ‘Internet Economist,’ an online tutorial provided by the Economics Network may help develop students’ skills and confidence with online resources:

<http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/he/tutorial/economist> .

Q13.j. Online learning using the Web

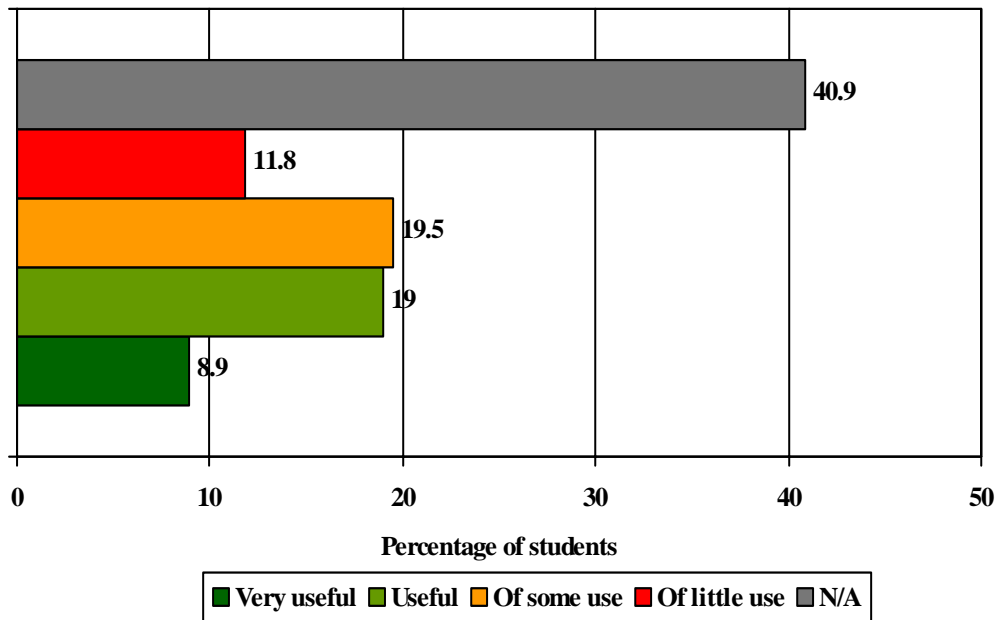


Half of all respondents and 62.4% of those who have it available to them, find online learning using the Web useful. There were differences in students’ replies due to the year of study and age. Most positive about online learning were first and fourth year students 53.9% and 53.4% respectively (or 66.3% and 68.6% of those who were offered that type of learning). Two out of five postgraduates find it useful, although this number growth to more than three out of five if availability is taken. Differences in students’ perceptions of online learning due to their age are mainly concerned with the availability of these types of activities. As previously discussed the non-availability of online learning using the web for the mature group of students of 26 and older is double to that of other age groups and equal to 35.9%. Even those of them, who have it available, were the least positive about online learning among all age groups – 57.7% compared to 63.9% of 18–21 year olds and 60.7% of 22–25 year olds. Younger students are more accustomed to the use of computers in their everyday life and see online learning as an essential part of it, while it could be a struggle to the mature students due to the factors discussed above.

Among the students’ comments: “Annoying to access.”; “Can’t find the exact book.”; “Good depending on lecturer.”; “This isn’t offered but would be a great help.”; “Very

useful in first year, as it was interactive.”; “Online learning using the Web can help me learn more.”; “Online learning using the Web, because we will always use the internet to look for sorts of information any time any place. It’s so useful.”

Q13.k. Online learning using Economics software



Online learning using Economics software was not available to two out of five respondents. Those who have it available were split into two nearly equal groups of those who consider it to be useful (46.6%) and others, who see in it only some or little use (53.4%). Many factors were statistically significant for this question: year of study, gender, age, first language and first choice of degree.

Postgraduates were the most positive group: 58.7% of them, who have it available, find it useful. Least positive were second and third year students – 61.1% and 59.2% of those, who have it available, find it only of some or little use

Students who study Economics as their first choice were more positive than those who don’t – 48.7% and 40.8% of those who have it available find it useful.

Females were more positive than males in finding Economics software useful: 50.7% compared to 44.4% of males.

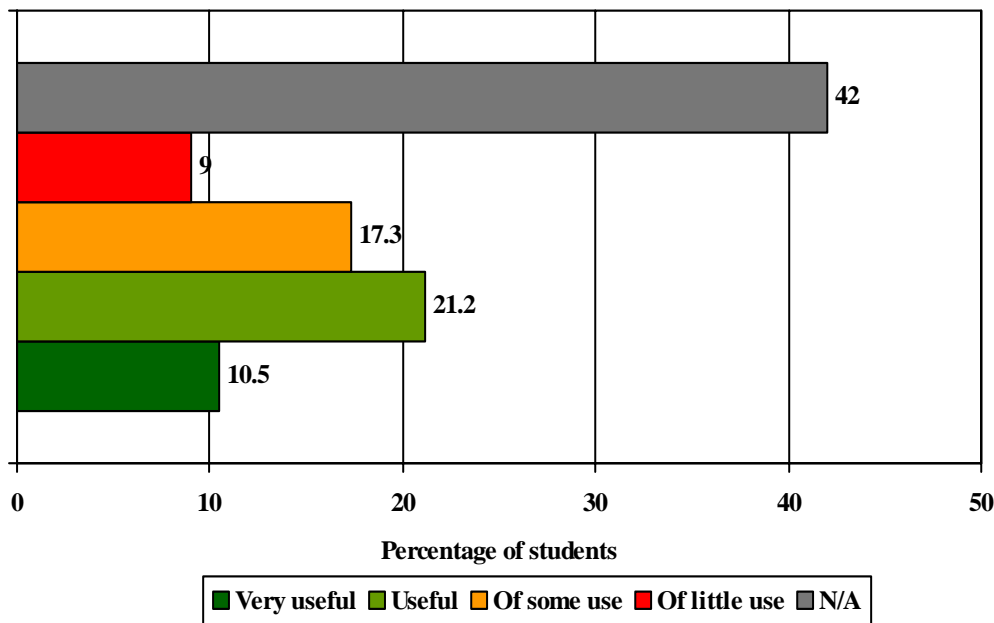
Those with English as first language were less positive, than respondents with other first language: 45.8% versus 49.8%.

Most positive about use of software were mature students, who started university at 26 or older: 58.3% of them, who have it available, find it useful, compared to 45.1% of 18–21 year olds and 52.5 % of 22–25 year olds. This is in contrast to the respondents’ answers to the previous question regarding online learning using the web, when mature students were the least positive. It could be due to the fact that all groups of students were new to the use of Economics software and have to learn it from scratch; whilst with online learning younger students were more frequent users of the web.

In the comments many students point to the lack of availability of this type of activity to them: “Haven’t really used it yet.”; “I don’t have one at the moment, but would love to have.”; “Not part of the course but I have used economic software anyway and have found it very useful.”

The survey also included open-ended questions Q21 and Q21.a. regarding the types of Economics software being used in degrees and asks students to comment about its usefulness. They are analysed later in the report.

Q13.1. Online questions and tests (not assessed)



Not assessed online questions and tests were not available to 41.8% of respondents. At the same time majority of those who are offered online tests find them useful (54.5%).

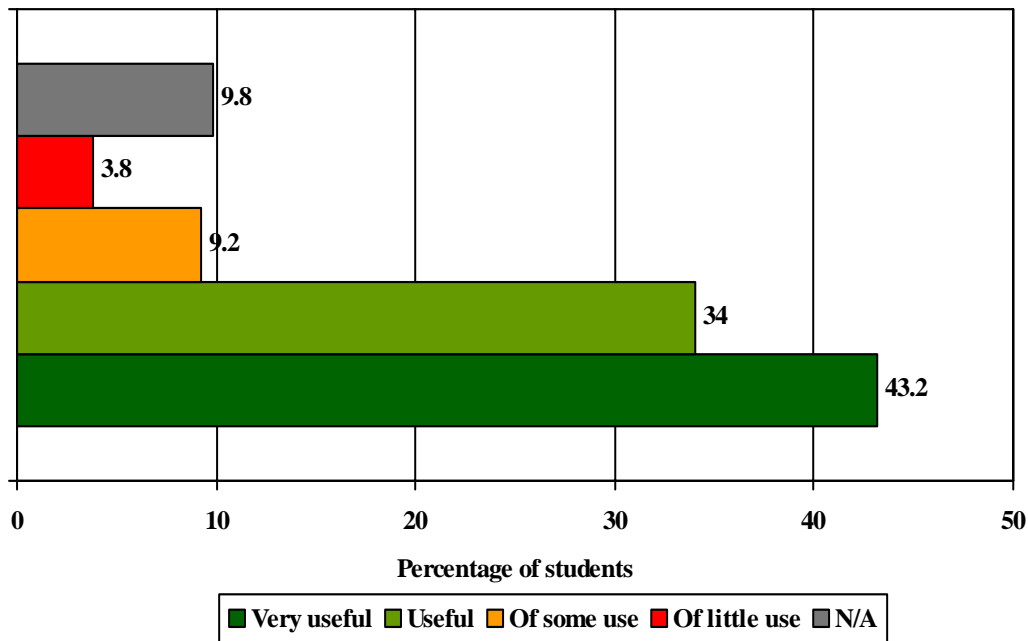
There were differences in the answers to this question due to year of study, gender and choice. Online questions and tests were more available to the students in year one and two, who feel most positive about them (59.2% and 54.3% respectively). This type of learning was available to only 37.4% of postgraduates, but the majority of them were also positive about its usefulness.

Similar to the answers to the previous question females were more positive than males in their responses – 58.1% of females who have it available, find them useful, compared to 52.1% of males. Those who have chosen Economics as their first choice of degree were more positive about tests, than those who didn’t – 56.6% and 48.3% respectively.

Students left both positive and negative comments: “Used in First year very successfully but lacking in 2nd year.”; “Annoying to access.”; “Available at your own leisure, came with the book.”; “N/A – do not have this in my degree: not seen any.”

Respondents suggest, “Online assessments to be done outside term would be useful to check on understanding of the course content.”; “More online tuition with weekly questions to complete.”; “Online tests are a good idea and could be used more as and when the student wants.”

Q13.m. Materials posted by lecturer on course VLEs (such as Blackboard or WebCT) or website



Materials posted by lecturer on course VLEs or websites are available to 90.2% of respondents. At the same time only 67.0% of respondents replied in Q22 that their degree course make use of VLEs, so we can presume that the remaining 23.2% use materials posted by lecturer on websites. More than three quarters of them find these resources useful. There are differences in students’ replies due to their year of study, age and first language.

Most positive about them were students from years one and two. More than every four out of five students in these years find materials on VLEs and websites useful. They also have the highest availability of these resources among all students groups: they are available to 93.7 % of first year students and 93.0% of second year students. The non-availability doubles to 14.7% for year 3 and to 13.3% to year four students. It is also less available to postgraduate students – 15.9% of them said that they didn’t have this option.

The non-availability of materials posted on VLEs or website doubles, as already mentioned for mature students of 26 and older. It is not available to 18.8% of them, compared to 8.9% of 18–21 year olds and 8.3% of 22–25 year olds. We have previously discussed the possible reasons for this.

Students with English as a first language were more positive about this question: 86.3% of them, who have posted materials on VLEs available, find it useful, compared to 83.0% of non native English speakers.

In their comments to this question students mostly complain about resources that are not on the VLEs or website: “WebCT not used enough by some lecturers.”; “Some lecturers are unwilling to post materials online, as they say it makes us lazy in lectures, but it is very difficult to write everything down and listen.”; “Some lecturers-very useful, others has too little explanation or no content at all.”; “There was not a lot (if any!) of extra material posted.”; “Very few of the lecturers use blackboard!”; “Very useful when it is there, but some lecturers choose not to use it.”

Additional students’ comments on the usefulness of VLEs will be discussed later in the report.

Q13.n. Communication tools (e.g. discussion board) in course VLEs

Communication tools in course VLEs were not available to one third of all respondents. Those who have them available don’t find them particularly useful: three out of five find it only of some or little use. At the same time many students complain about the lack of interactivity in online learning.

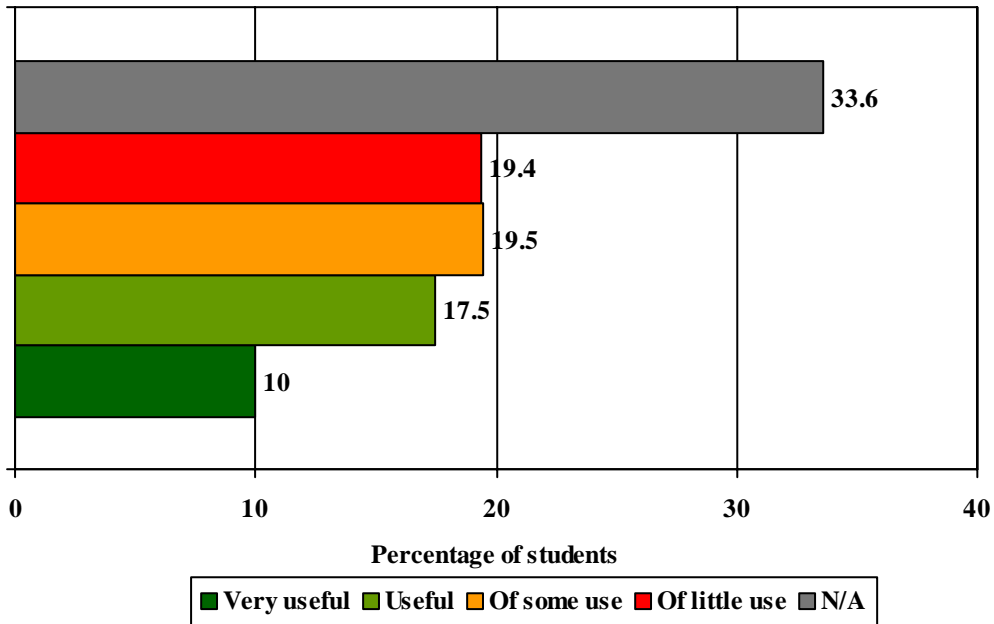
There were differences in students attitudes due to their year of study, gender and age.

Communication tools were more available to students in year one and two (74.2% and 68.9% respectively) and unavailable to more than half of postgraduates and to two out of five students in year three and four.

Females were more positive about its use, than males: 46.8% of those who have tools available found them useful, compared to 37.0% of males.

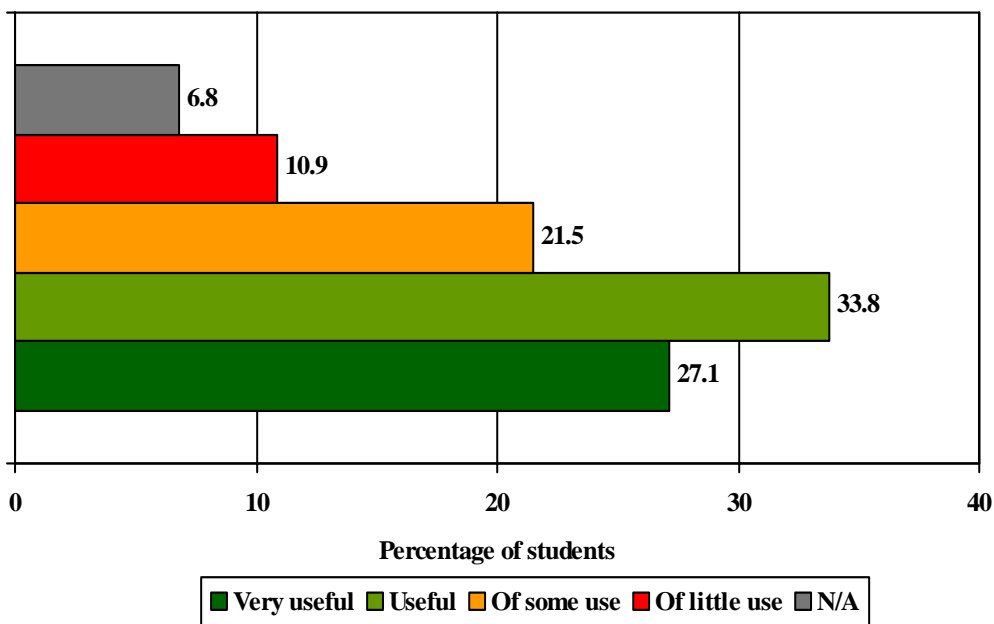
Communication tools were unavailable to nearly half of the mature students of 26 and older and to a third of 18–21 and 22–25 year olds. Mature students also have a biggest proportion of those who find it of little use – 38.6%.

In their comments students either complain on the way communication tools are used, or complain that they are not available to them:



“Completely useless. Most discussions are ridiculous.”; “Could be useful, but is not really used by anyone.”; “Little use – rarely used by course members.”; “If they are available they are not useful, because I did not know how to use it.”; “Of little use: Appears students don’t use this much – have never seen any information. “; “Of little use, as only one lecturer used it, but when used it was useful”.

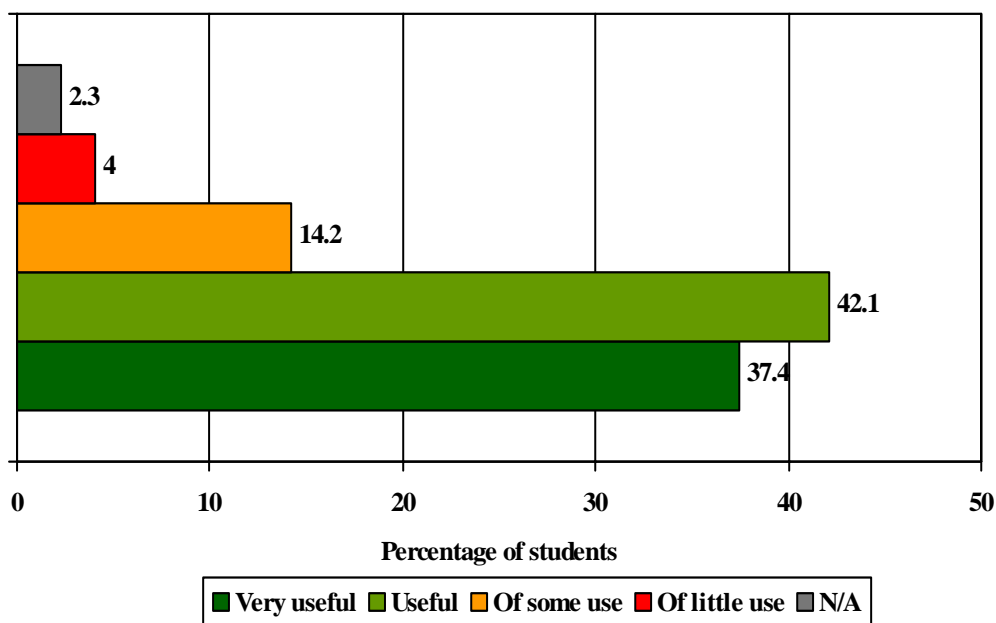
Q13.o. Feedback on submitted work



Every three out of five respondents found feedback useful, although one in ten feel that it is of little use to them. There were differences in students' replies due to year of study and A-level Maths. Most positive about feedback were students of the third and fourth year – 61.5% and 73.3%, while the least positive were postgraduates, with just 57.0% saying that it is useful. Feedback was unavailable to a bigger group of students without A-level Maths, than to the one with A-level Maths: 7.0% and 4.2%. Students without A-level Maths were relatively more positive, then students with it: 65.0% and 64.3% for students who have feedback available to them.

In their comments students expressed their dissatisfaction with the quantity and quality of feedback: “Could do with more feedback.”; “Don’t get much at all.”; “Essential but badly done on my course.”; “Feedback has been minimal, but I believe it is extremely important to have feedback.”; “That was the worst aspect of teaching: we were lucky if we even got one whole sentence of feedback; probably due to the size of classes and lack of lecturers.”; “Good but not enough!”; “Most useful where teachers give more detailed feedback.” They also explain why they answer that feedback was only of some use: “Of some use: Feedback late and sometimes very vague. No suggestion for improvement in work.”; “Of some use: poor handwriting really put me off.”; “There was very little and so of little use.” Most frequent comment was: “The quality of the feedback varied between markers, some was very good, others feedback was nonexistent.” There were also comments that feedback was not available: “There is no feedback on submitted work.”; “Useful, but never receive it!”; “We get no feedback except a grade.”

Q13.p. Preparing for exams and/or tests



More than three quarters of respondents find preparation for exams and tests useful. There were differences in their answers due to the year of study, age and choice.

Most positive were students of third and fourth year: 82.0% and 85.5% of them find it useful. Least positive were first year students – 77.1% of them replied that it is useful.

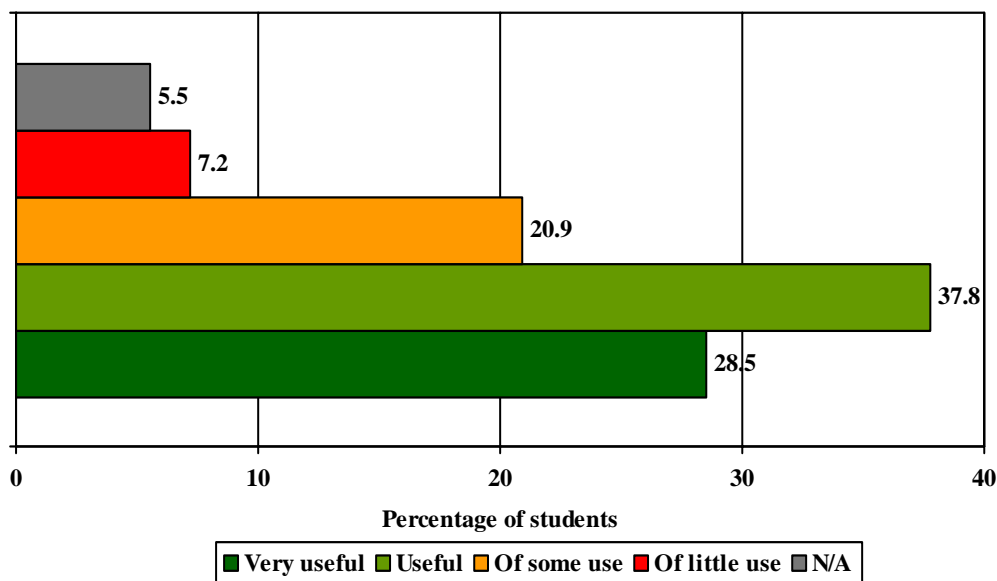
Students with their first choice degree of Economics were least negative about this type of learning, than students with different first choice: 17.5% and 21.7% respectively find it of some and little use.

It was less available to the more mature students of 26 years and older: 8.5% of them find it unavailable, compared to 1.6% of 18–21 year olds and 2.2% of 22–25 year olds. Younger students of 18–21 were most positive about it: 80.7% of them find it useful, compared to 75.0% of 22–25 year olds. Mature students, who have it available to them, were also very positive about it: 80.3% among them find it useful.

In their comments students stress again the difference in usefulness of this type of learning based on the quality of lecturers: “Differs from one lecturer to another. Some are excellent, others terrible.”, while others point to the non-availability of this kind of activities – “Nothing offered by lecturers in this regard.”

Students ask for more “Help with preparation for exams, e.g. sample questions, past papers etc.”; “Preparing for class exams. It forces me to study quite hard to get a higher mark.”

Q13.q. Working informally with other students



The majority of students (66.3%) find working informally with other students useful for their learning. There were differences in students’ answers due to the year of study, age and first language. First year students, who are new to university and have less experience in working informally, were the least positive – only 61.8% of them find it useful. Typical comment from first year students includes: “Very hard to get together people, as we don’t know each other.” But the longer students study the more positive they feel about it: from 68.3% of second year students to 76.7% of fourth year students were positive about working informally with other students.

Mature students of 26 years and older have three times less possibilities than others to work informally with other students (13.7% of them mark it as N/A, compared to 4.9% of 18–21 year olds and 3.5% of 22–25 year olds). This may be due to not living

on campus and socialising so much with other students. Students from 22 to 25 years old – find it most useful – 68.4% were positive.

Students with English as their first language find it easier to communicate with other students’ and hence probably regard this activity as more useful, than students with other first languages: 68.3% compared to 61.3% find this activity useful.

Students’ comments on working together include: “Don’t really have the opportunity.”; “Very few students at the MSc level are interested in working together. However, there are few who embrace this and it has been useful to share ideas and cement understanding.”; “Other students show less commitment than me normally.”; “Should be useful, but not too many chances to do so.”

Q14. Please identify the best one or two aspects of your degree course and say why

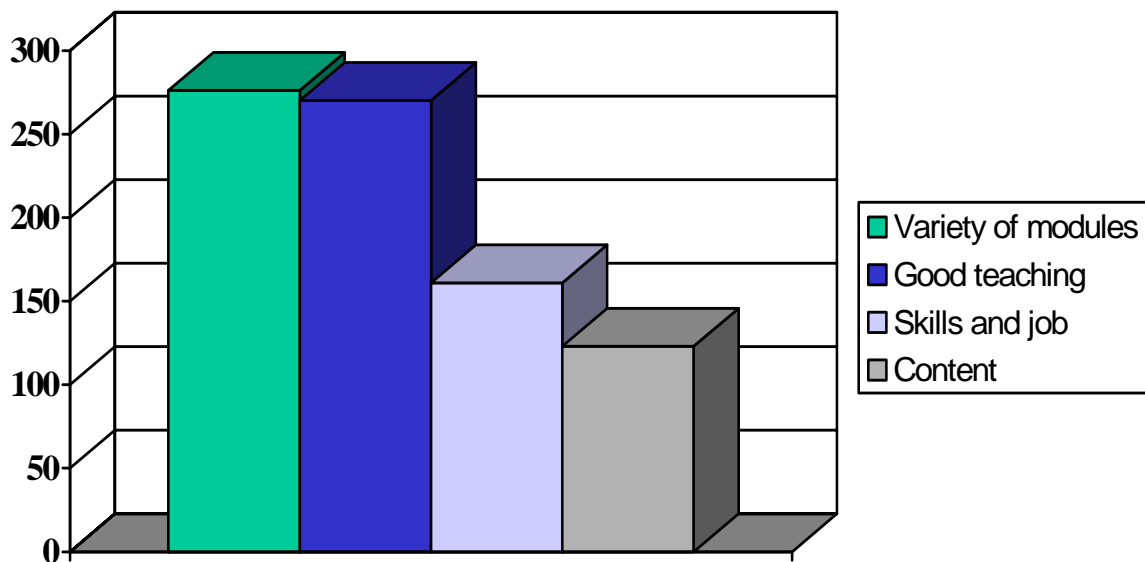


Figure 5 Coded responses to Question 14

All respondents answered this question. Among the most frequently mentioned best aspects of courses are quality of staff and lecturers, variety of modules to study, future job prospects and course content. Answers are very similar to the ones given in the 2004 students’ survey.

Students praise lecturers for being informative, providing enough interesting material for the studies and for the exam preparation and relating theories to the real-world: “Mostly very good lecturers – those with passion very motivating and willing to help.”; “The lecturers that are passionate about the material and are able to use non-Economics related illustrations which helps students think outside the box.”; “The lecturers are not old fashioned economists – they relate the theories to modern day examples to help us understand the concepts easier.” Many students consider advice given by the lecturers and encouragement of independent thinking to be the best aspect of the course.

Students appreciate the flexible structure of the course and the wide choice of modules, as well as the subject of Economics itself and breadth of topics covered.

Their comments include: “Extensive range of modules to choose from, which allows us to choose according to our preferences.”; “Flexibility in choice of course units allowing you to tailor the degree to your interests.”; “The wide variety of modules has allowed me to explore different areas of Economics.”; “The majority of lecturers have been excellent and made learning far more interesting.”; “Excellent choice of options for Economics student: allows me to study some specific area of Economics that I like; and able to choose non-Economics modules.”; “Focus on core economic issues giving good grounding in the subject. Large choice of different modules from which to choose giving the option of a broad spectrum of learning.”

Possible use of knowledge from the variety of modules in preparation for future careers and job opportunities is considered by many to be one of the best aspect of courses: “The diversity of future career opportunities.”; “The best aspect has been the variety of modules on offer, as they have enabled me to gain a good pool of skills for future job.”; “Learning material which is relevant to my future career. This gives me an insight into the application of theory.”; “Development of critical thinking ability, because this is very useful in the real workplace.”; “Economics is highly respected by employers.”

Working with other students is mentioned, as one of the best aspects of the course “high level of fellow students” is seen as one of the main benefits: “The best part of my degree has been to work with a large number of individuals who are all interested in progressing in their careers and futures in the same way as myself.”; “The opportunity to get used to working within teams outside of Economics and the variety of modules studied.”; “Working with other students was very useful since it permits to exchange opinion and intuition about relevant topics.”

The course is considered by some to be intellectually challenging, making students work hard: “Economics is a stimulating, and challenging degree, which can be very difficult at times. This is how a university degree should be!!” Students also report that the excellent level of supervision and feedback makes the course very enjoyable.

Many students enjoy the content of their degree course: “Enjoying macroeconomics and working on theory models and short tests. Purely because I am good at them, and enjoy them.”; “The combination of Maths and essays found in microeconomics. I love both these subjects.”

Other best aspects of the course include: degree structure, use of resources, use of VLEs, ability to study abroad, friendly atmosphere, interaction in tutorials, feedback and support provided – “The best aspect of my course, would be the communication between lecturer and student, I get feedback on all work submitted in detail. They will help you as much as possible with any problem.”; “The Feedback system is fantastic. You are told exactly where you went wrong and how you can improve on it.”

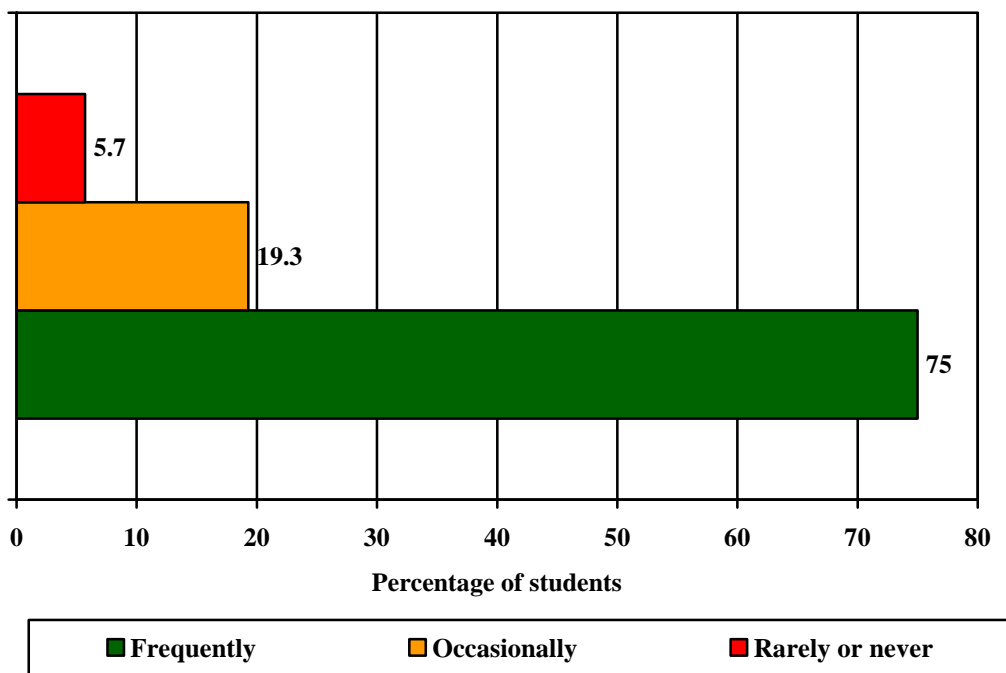
Q15. Activities in seminars / tutorials / small classes

In order to better understand students’ perceptions of their learning it is important to know what kinds of activities are available to them in seminars/ tutorials/ small classes. In the questions that follow we ask students to rank the frequency of the suggested activities on a 3-point scale: “Frequently”, “Occasionally” and “Rarely or

never”. As teaching practice varies in different years of study we’ll also look at students replies according to their year at HE.

Two most frequent activities used in seminars/ tutorials/ small classes are going through pre-prepared problem sets of worksheets (75.0%) and working through questions given out in seminars as a whole group (38.9%). At the same time rarest activities are games, experiments and role-play (rarely or never used by 81.9%). In the questions Q16 and Q16a we asked students to comment on the types of activities they find most useful and also to suggest one or two ways in which seminars could be improved.

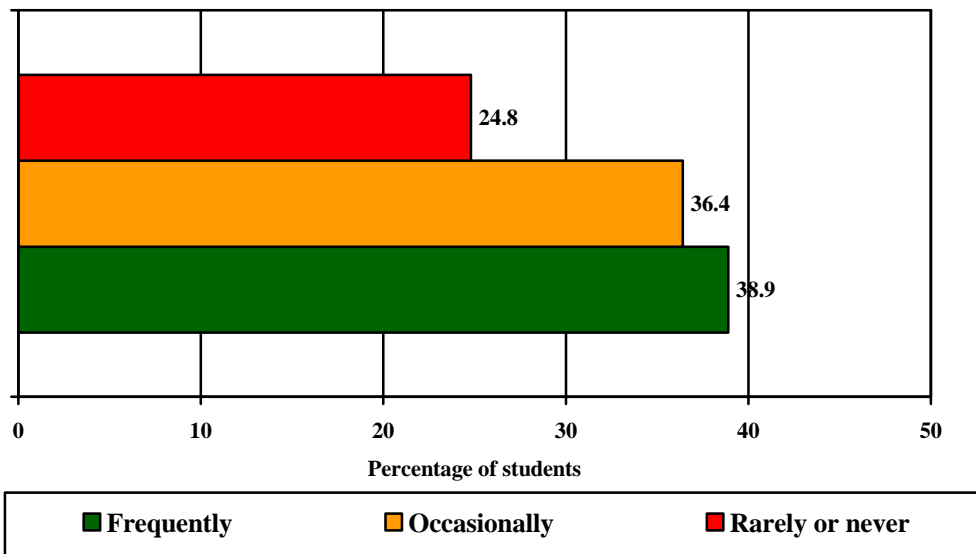
Q15.a. Going through pre-prepared problem sets of worksheets



This is the most often used activity in seminars for all students. Three quarters of all respondents experienced this frequently, although it varies in different years of study: ranging from 82.1% in year one to 56.1% for postgraduates.

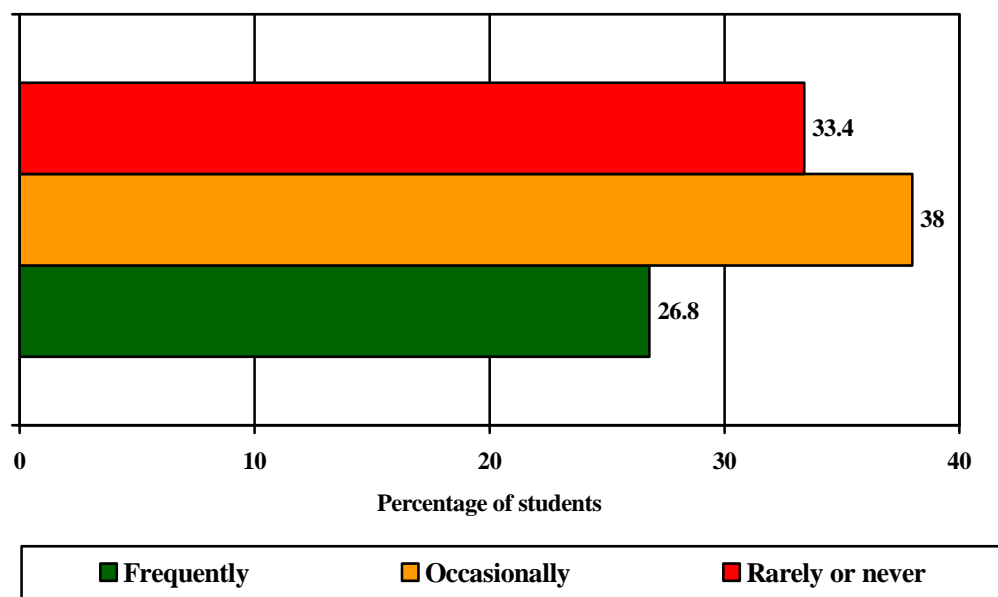
In their replies to the next question (Q16) students commented on the usefulness of this activity and praise it as one of the best ways to organise seminar work: “Going through the questions set before the seminar to understand why the answers the way they are.”; “Going through pre-prepared problem sets or worksheets.”; “Questions issued prior to class that one has to research as opposed to finding the information on a particular text book.”

Q15.b. Working through questions given out in seminar as a whole group



This is the second often-used activity in seminars. It is used frequently by 38.9% of all respondents. Its use varied in different years of study. 43.5% of the first year students reply that they work through questions given out in seminar as whole group frequently, this number decreases with each year to 24.3% for postgraduates. Among the students’ comments: “I like best working through questions as a whole group.”; “Best – working through questions given out as a whole group or in a small group.”

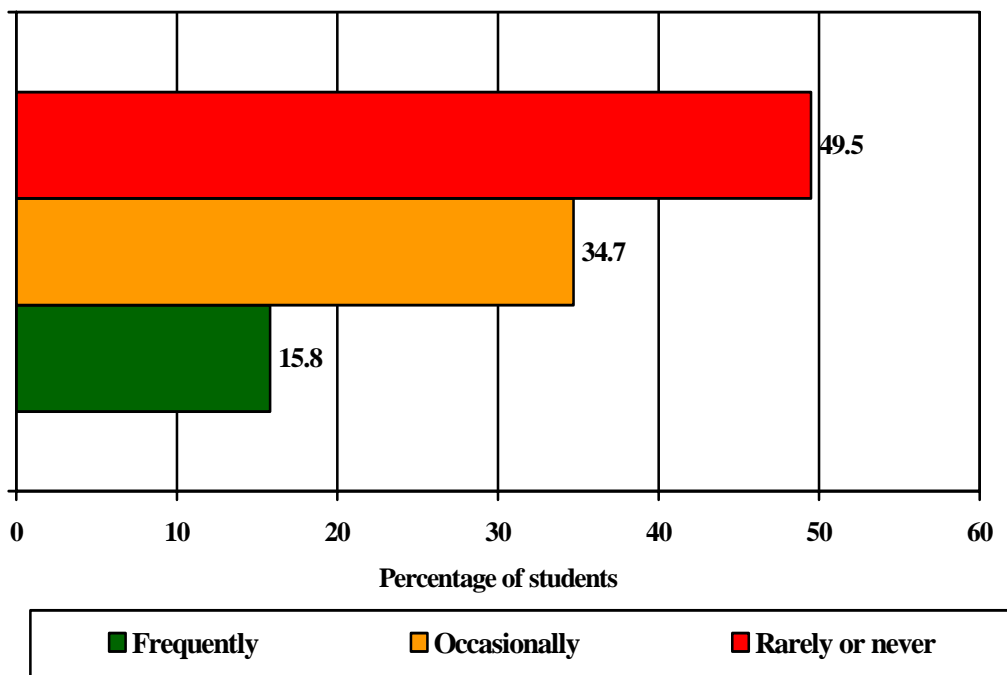
Q15.c. Working through questions given out in seminars in small groups



More than a quarter (26.8%) of all respondents work through questions given out in seminars in small groups. This number comes to round 30.0% in year one, three and four and decreases to 27.4% for year two and to 13.4% for postgraduates. Students’

comments include: “I like working in smaller groups where there is interaction between students.”; “I enjoy small group discussion, followed by whole group discussion.”; “Best – where we are asked to get into small groups to prepare the presentation of one of the answers.”

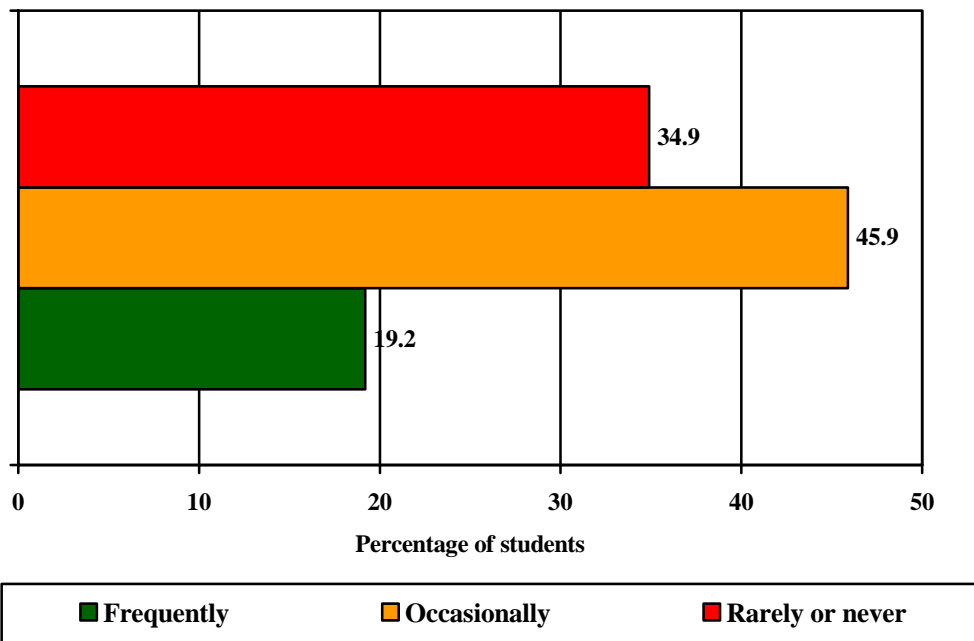
Q15.d. Individual presentations of papers



Nearly half of all respondents rarely or never have individual presentations of papers during seminars/tutorials/small classes (49.5%). Use of this activity varied in different years, with the tendency opposite to 15.b or 15.c: it is used frequently only by 10.5% of respondents in year one but by 26.7% in year 4. One in five of postgraduates use it frequently too.

Respondents highly value the use of presentations in small-group learning. They point out that presentations “help you learn your topics in depth, and although perhaps stressful, are very helpful.”; “I like individual Presentations and than debate.”; “Presentations given by groups are useful for helping you remember parts of the course.”; “Presentations are very useful to learn speaking in front of a group of people. However, presentations are only introduced in the third year, which I think is a disadvantage.” Some of the students were critical: “Presentations by students not so useful – half the time they're crap and don't know what they are talking.”

Q15.e. Mini-lecture by tutor

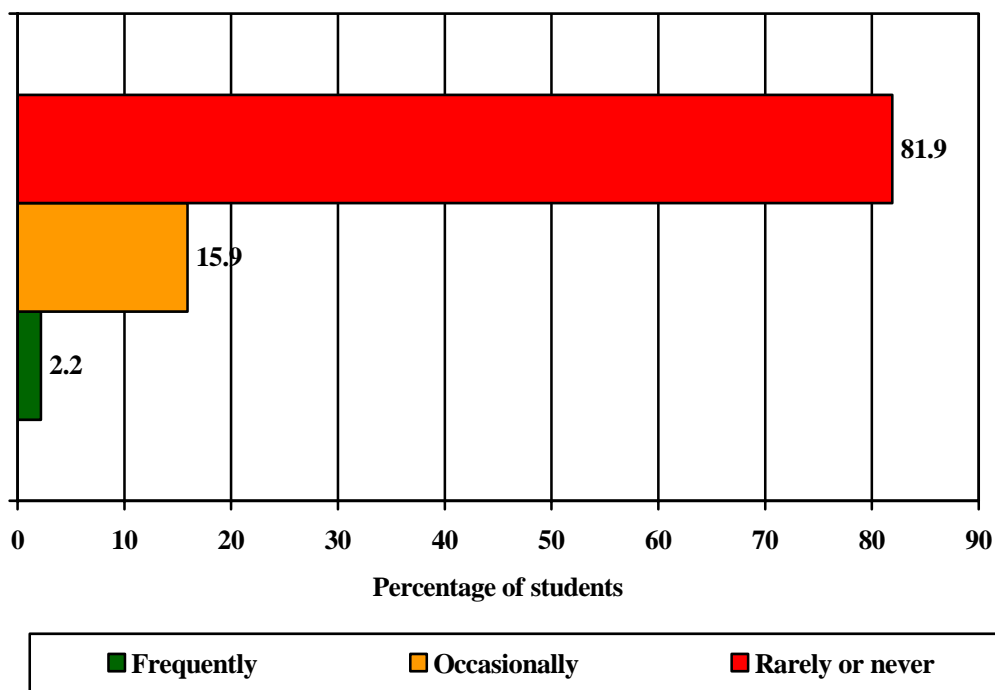


Only one in five respondents frequently have mini-lectures by tutors in small classes. One in three has them only rarely or never.

There is a difference in the way mini-lectures are used in classes. Nearly three quarters of students in year 3 and 4 have them to some extent, while this number is lower for students in year one (62% have them) and two (63.2%) and goes down to 54.2% for postgraduates.

Students have mixed perceptions of mini-lectures – some find them useful in clarifying some questions, while others see it as an inability of the lecturer to deliver an interactive seminar. Among the comments: “Seminars aren't very interactive and tutors are happy to give a mini-lecture when they realise students are unprepared.”; “Mini-lectures as it's more informal.”; “Small lectures by the tutors and times when tutors have asked us which areas we struggle over and helped us on specific areas of the course, been clear and slow and helpful.”

Q15.f. Games, experiments, role-play



Unfortunately lecturers do not frequently use games and simulations. Nearly four out of five students rarely or never have games, experiments and role-play in their classes. Those who have them rated them highly: “I quite enjoy role-plays, exercises in class.”; “Best activities – role play and games.”

The Economics Network provides resources and workshops to departments which are interested in introducing games, simulations and role-play to students.

Q16. What types of seminar activities have you found to be most useful?

1,128 respondents answered this question. The majority of students say that going through the pre-set problems or questions is the seminar activity they find most useful. Typical comments include: “Working through pre-prepared problem-sets.”; “Individual prepared work with answers fully explained in class.” Working through questions improves their understanding of the material and prepares them for exams. Working with past exam papers is good as well: “Going through problems sets and previous exams.”; “Going through previous exam papers.”; “Going through exam questions and techniques especially on more complex subjects – It gives the student skills in answering questions which is often a heavy contributor to the actual mark.”; “Working through past questions in macroeconomics where the lecturer give feedback and tips on how to improve exam technique.”

Some students consider group presentations and debates afterwards to be a useful activity: “Working through pre-prepared problems and doing presentations on a given topic and than facing questions on it.”; “Pre submit a compulsory small essay on the topic to be discussed and discuss this further within the seminar as a group debate.”;

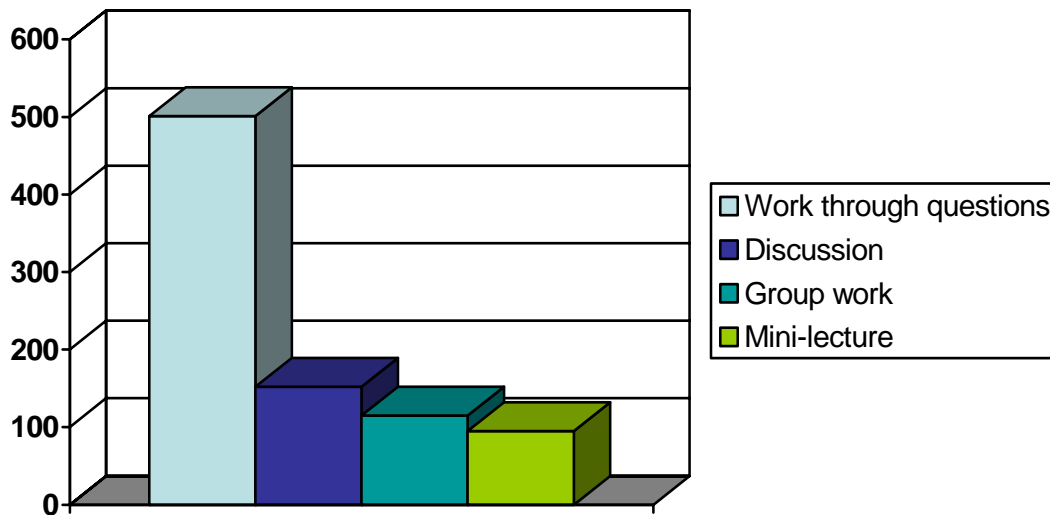


Figure 6 Coded responses to Question 16

“The presentations are very useful as feedback is always given by lecturers and fellow students.” Some parts of the seminars where older students take part are also considered useful – “Presentations by older students on methodology.”; “Help Desks where PHD students answer questions – because the students are very friendly and accessible and don't make you feel stupid whatever questions you ask.”

Various kind of group work activities were suggested: “Group research projects.”; “Group work involving games.”; “Group talks.”; “Small group problem solving exercises.”; “Working in small groups with my class mates.”; “Preparing work and then discussing it as a group, learning from each other.”

Mini-lectures, class discussion and debates encourage understanding and helps students to “understand the theory in more simple, straightforward explanation”. Among other comments: “Discussing lectures in small groups to insure a full understanding of what's been covered.”; “Where there is active discussions of the issues.”; “Debating with the lecturer.”; “Mini-lecture followed by discussion of material such as set essays or questions! Very useful!”; “Depends on type of course. Discussion type seminars have been useful for macro/micro for instance, but have preferred the more structured nature of econometric seminars.”; “Freely talking about whatever relates to the topic and in this way observing how other people think and talk about certain problems.”; “Discussion followed by plenary session where lecturer sums up (useful to guide students)”.

Interaction (business) games and role plays are mentioned as very useful: “Strategic interaction games for micro.”; “Role play, as we need to clearly explain what we're doing.”; “Role play and games.”; “Role-playing, It makes one think one's way through it and than we retain what we learn.”

Q16.a. Name one or two ways in which seminars could be improved

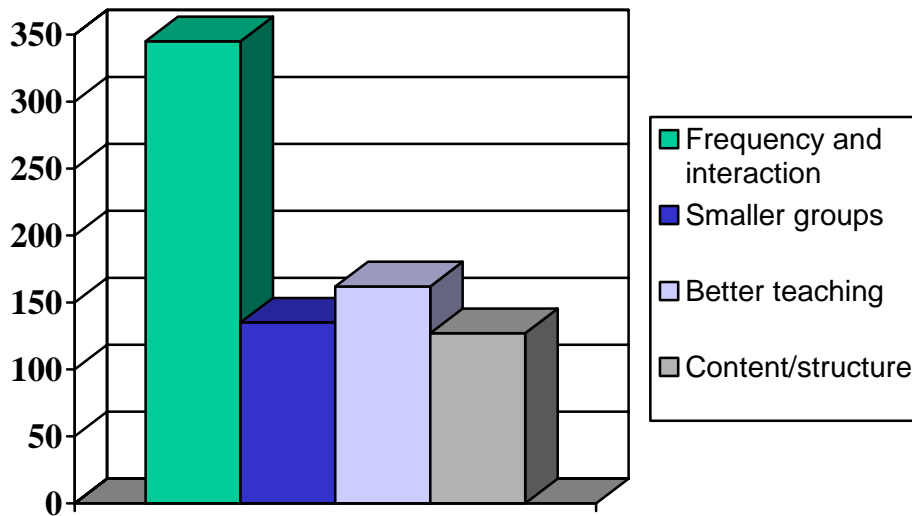


Figure 7 Coded responses to Question 16a

More than half of the respondents answered this question. To improve the seminars, they suggest running seminars more frequently and interactively, making groups smaller and organising them according to the student's ability levels, as well as changing the content/structure of seminars and improving teaching.

The quality of teaching is mentioned very often, especially of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), their poor English language and lack of pedagogy skills: "Less of a language barrier with seminar teachers to provide a greater understanding."; "Stronger English speaking tutors that are able to explain problems more clearly."; "More lecturers doing classes rather than Ph d students."; "Make tutors more prepared and undergo training and be able to communicate with the student, and teach them the art of making the students communicating with each other as well as the tutor."; "Better teaching quality. A good start would be making sure that PhD students could actually speak decent English and know how to teach."

Smaller class size and good teachers would encourage more participation in the seminar and better involvement: "Smaller group sizes are better – try to encourage better participation through group discussions."; "Possibly smaller class sizes might propel students to participate more which now happens rarely."

Students were not happy with the teaching methods used in their departments and ask for "better trained tutors" and "more games, experiments and fun ways to learn. Also if the teacher goes through a little bit of appropriate lecture materials it would be helpful. Smaller groups – typically 10 would be good, rather than 15 or 25."

Other suggestion on improving teaching include: "Training teachers to ensure that a high standard is consistent across the department."; "Get tutors who does not just sit and drone on like the one we have. I do not mean to be rude but she seems as if she does not know what she is talking about;" "More games to help make it more fun to learn"; "Most of the time, due to time constraint, lecturers just give brief explanations

or just state theories. I think they should provide some examples so that students know how to apply or to deal with problems in the exams.”

Students suggestions for the content/structure improvements include wider use of the “problem-based learning”, solving practise sets, as that allows them to learn about application of the theory. More discussion-based activities and more in-depth study of the subject could improve the seminars – “More group work!! Very disappointing that this way of learning is not incorporated in my degree at all although it's so useful.”; “More discussions so people who don't really understand certain aspects of the topic can question why the answer is the case and why not something else. More exercises relating to the lecture material to provide a clearer comprehension of the subject material. Also it would be good to see a course that places an emphasis of thinking beyond the lecture material, more emphasis placed on thinking and not so much about solid learning and repetition of the lecture notes.”

Students complain of the ‘boring’ seminars and ask for more interaction – “Classes tend to be really quiet... tutors should try to make the class more stimulating maybe by do more games and role-play to give out answers of the questions.”; “More feed back or participation by the students. Often the class just sits there listening to the lecturer, which can become boring. The students should be made to interact more even if it is just in discussion. Why are there no debates? Surely a debate would get everyone involved. The lecturer could set a motion and the class could debate it. The debates could be prepared or not. Have teams. Rather than have the lecturer prepare seminars, the students would through the preparation for the debates. Among the content, students would benefit from increased confidence in public speaking, independent research instead of being “spoon fed” and most importantly learn to develop independent opinions and respect those of others.”

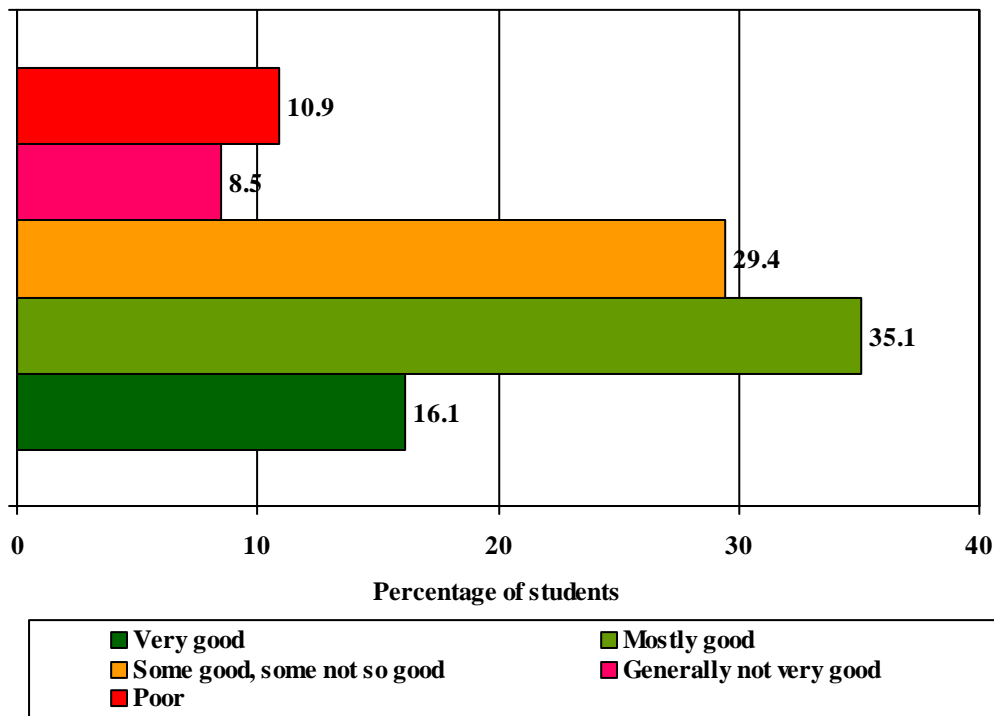
Some students mention the lack of integration between the lecture and the seminar material, or the repetition of lecture in the seminar – “Sometimes they just repeat the lectures which isn't very useful.”; “Making seminars contain interesting pieces of information not given out in the lectures will be better.”; “More emphasis should be given on filling in the gaps left by the lectures.”

Respondents suggest that more one-on-one teaching and more interesting, interactive and participatory teaching could help improve the seminars. Use of real life examples in the seminars is recommended: “Theory needs to be related to real life situations from the beginning of the learning process.”; “Show more application of theory.”

Students also mentioned setting homework that has to be done for the following seminar, as this, they say, would make them actually work for the seminar: “I think we can improve seminars by giving students a message through mail or at class what we are going to work on next week and also by giving a brief introduction of topic before questioning people.”

With all the shortcomings of the way seminars are conducted many respondents don't have enough of them: “More of them would be a start!”

Q17. How effective have you found the teaching of Maths and stats on your course?



The issue of teaching Maths and stats for Economics students continues to be a controversial one. About half of the respondents found the teaching of Maths and stats on their course to be good, though the other half is split between “some good, some not so good” (29.4%) with one in ten perceive it to be “poor” and one in twelve to be “generally not very good”.

Among the problems students stated bad teaching, lack of differentiation between students with and without A-levels in Maths and inadequate support. Students commented: “The quality of teaching of Maths and stats varies greatly in my course. There are lecturers from both end of the spectrum.”; “Lecturers very often assume every student has attained a certain level of mathematical understanding which is often not the case.”; “Maths course is poorer, stats course is excellent and comprehensive.”; “Assumed A level Maths, when a third of entrance group did not have a level Maths.”

There were differences in students’ perceptions of teaching Maths due to their age, A-level Maths and first language. Those who have A-level Maths at school were more positive about it: 55.4% of them found it to be good, while among those without A-level Maths, this number is lower at 46.7%. This is understandable, as they came better prepared for the course and need less support. Non native English speakers were more positive, than native English speakers: 57.3% of them feel the teaching to be good, compared to 50.4%. This could be due to previous knowledge of those students and additional support they receive at the university. Views of mature students towards teaching Maths and stats are the most controversial. They include the biggest group among all ages, who think that teaching is ‘very good’ – 25.6%

(compared to 15.4% of 18–21 year olds and 20.2% of 22–25 year olds) and at the same time the biggest group who thinks that it is ‘poor’ – 11.1%, compared to 7.9% of 18–21 year olds and 6.6% of 22–25 year olds. This split could be also due the previous students’ knowledge in Maths and level of support they receive at University.

Q17.a How could the teaching of Maths and stats be improved?

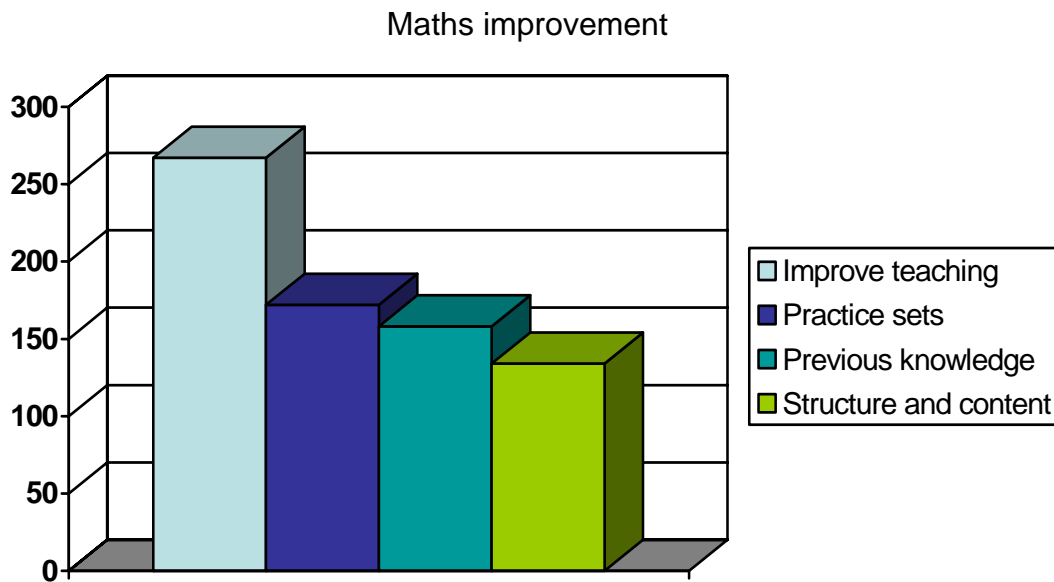


Figure 8 Coded responses to Question 17a

1,094 students answered this question. Some students report that they are content with the way teaching of Maths and stats is organised: “The courses for these subjects have been very well presented. Challenging but manageable with effort.”; “I believe it’s at the highest level already.”

Others suggest need for improving teaching methods, use of practice sets, taking into account previous knowledge and improving structure and content of the modules.

Suggestions on how the teaching could be improved include “more communication with students, assessing individual students’ needs, listening to feedback about teaching methods, etc.”

Students are critical of the quality of teaching itself, as lecturers are disinterested, lecture material is outdated, the classes are too big and the material is either the same as in the textbook or is not properly explained at a very fast pace, so not everybody is able to cope. Comments include: “Be more aware of the flow – don’t sacrifice the understanding of students in order to keep up with the syllabus.”; “I think it’s important that lecturers don’t brush aside the Maths and underestimate its difficulty. Just because they find it easy, it doesn’t mean that students necessarily find it so straightforward.”; “Have teachers that are confident in what they are telling you so that you learn it rather than memorising a way of doing something one way. Would be better to see why we do things the way we do rather than ‘just put the numbers into the equation/table/graph”.

Many students complain of not being able to understand the lecturer because of his/her heavy foreign accents: "It would be very good if it was easier to understand the lectures, however it makes things seem twice as complicated when explained in a thick foreign accent."; "I don't want to sound racist but some of the foreign lecturers are quite hard to understand and their grammar isn't great."

Obviously students suggest having lecturers that are more interested in teaching and in the subject, that revise the lecture material and make lectures and the material interesting and stimulating: "Attitude of lecturer has a knock on effect on students."; "Lectures need to be more interesting."; "More interactive learning and more general support and extra examples sessions." The way material is organised is very important to respondents – "By signalling the most important parts and teaching them simply, rather than bogging down the important parts with other not so useful info."; "More detailed lecturing and focus in tutorials on the more difficult aspects of the course."; "Explaining the reasons why this is learnt, also, to explain its uses. It feels like I'm just learning useless theory, which is not motivating enough."

Also smaller groups for the teaching of Maths are suggested and a slower pace with thorough explanations: "Break up into smaller groups to ensure each student understands what's going on. Mass lectures can only hope to target the median student and that alienates students on the upper and lower spectre."

As students have different levels of Maths knowledge, they suggest breaking the class down into the ability groups and conducting preparation courses or possible extra Maths/stats classes for those without an A-level in Maths: "Dividing teaching between those who have done A-Level Maths and those who haven't."; "The wide range of ability means that able students are frequently bored, whereas less able students struggle. Therefore, students should be divided into classes according to their mathematical ability."

Slowing down the pace of the course is also often suggested: "It shouldn't be rushed, and they shouldn't assume all the students have grasped every concept in previous lectures. On some occasions it can be none-time consuming to quickly explain WHY this is such by quickly explaining the foundations again. There should be much more questions set for tutorials so everyone fully understands. Too many people failed Maths last semester including me which poor lecturers/tutors didn't help."

Additional summer classes or introductory classes are suggested: "By having a extra simple introduction course for people who are not very good at Maths so the rest of the class is not held back."; "Longer pre-session course 4 weeks not 2.5 weeks."

They suggest that more attention should be paid to doing practice sets in class and teacher should pace the class according to the level of students. The students suggest introducing more tutorials where practice sets are reviewed: "More exercises are needed."; "More assessed and non-assessed problem sets!!"; "Weekly assessments to add to final exam – so as to encourage seriousness. Involve practical experiments in stats – e.g. carrying out a survey."

Better use of VLEs is suggested – "In the first term, we had Maths and stats, and all lecturers put up detailed notes on blackboard for us to annotate. This made it very clear, and more importantly, meant we could pay more attention to what the lecturers were saying in lectures, rather than just copying down notes off the screen. The use of blackboard hasn't been used anywhere near as well for our Maths and econometrics subjects in term 2, and my personal performance in these subjects has suffered."

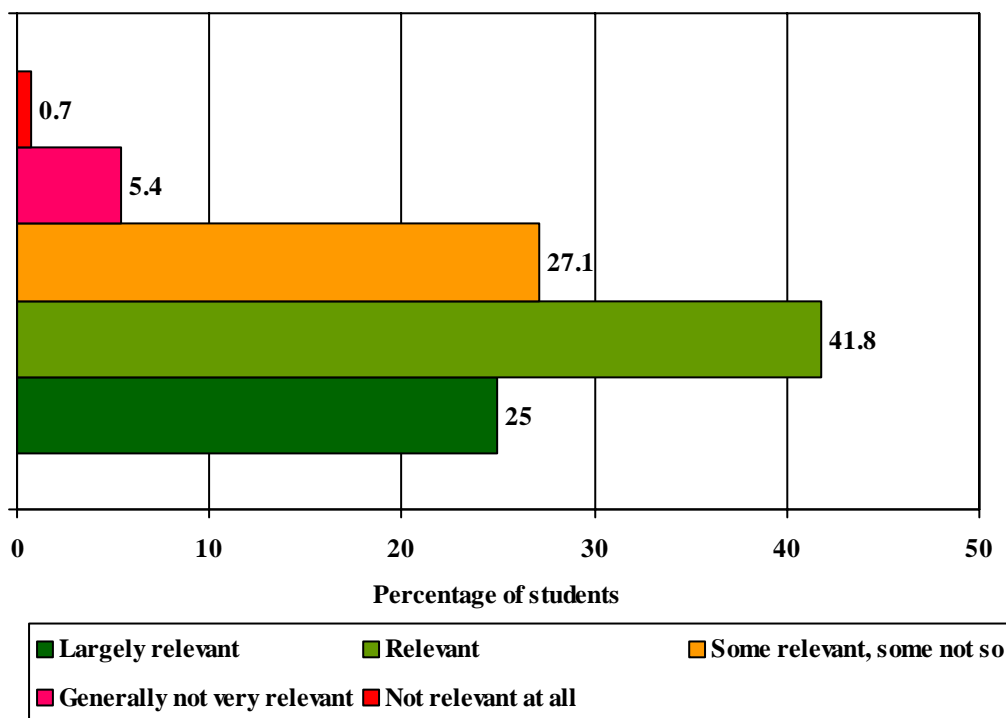
Some students report that they do not have access to past exam papers which could provide great assistance in exam preparation.

There are suggestions that Maths courses should be minimised: “Massively reduce the amount of theoretical material much of which is only useful for those who want to become an Economics professor or the minimal amount of people perhaps a dozen or so people across the entire UK. Stop wasting time on trying to place Maths where it isn't really needed”.

Students would like to get more contact time with lecturers to clarify the lecture material and receive more support and feedback on their work in general.

There are some comments on the organisation of the Maths classes: students are given wrong times, lectures are cancelled without warning, etc.

Q18. How relevant to the real world do you find the content of the degree?



Two thirds of the respondents perceive their course to be relevant to the real world and only one in seventeen sees it as generally not very relevant and not relevant at all.

There were differences in responses due to the year of study, age, gender and first choice of students.

First year students were the most positive about the course – 73.2% of them see their course as largely relevant and relevant. But the more theoretical their courses became the less relevant to the real world they see them: 67.5% of second year students and 57.8% of the third year students see it as relevant. Postgraduate students were the least positive – only 57.0% of them see it as relevant to the real world.

There is a big difference in students' perceptions due to their age: mature students, of 26 and older, who already have work experience, are more positive about their courses – 76.1% of them see it as relevant, compared to 66.6% of 18–21 year olds and 63.1 of 22–25 year olds.

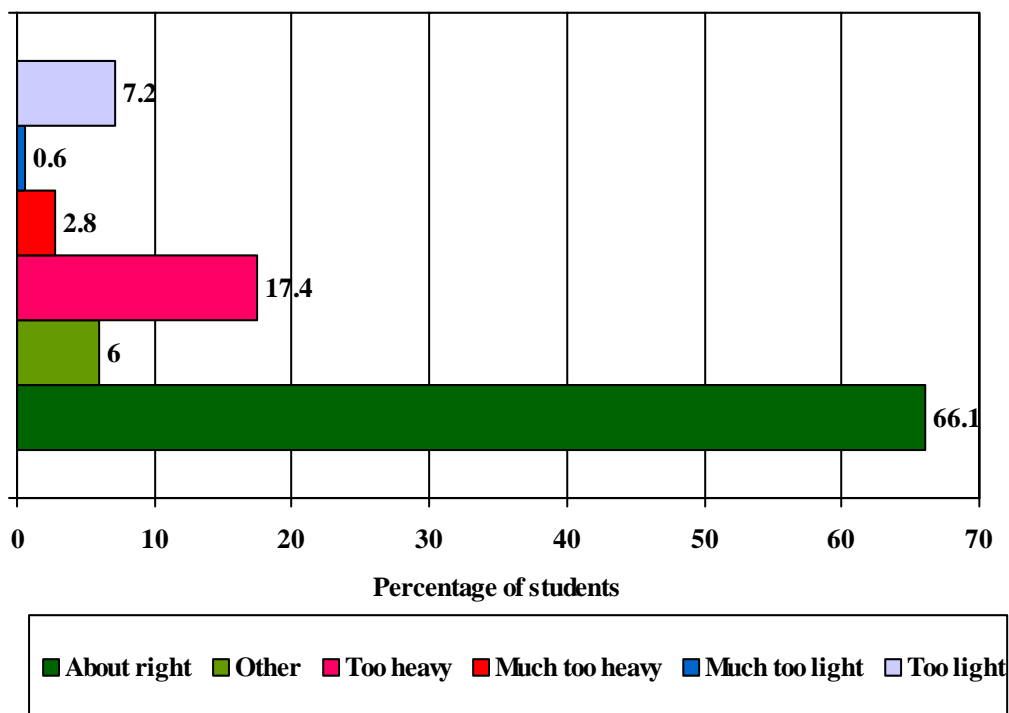
If Economics was the student's first choice of degree answers are more positive to this question: 68.0% of them see it as relevant, compared to 62.2% of those, for whom it wasn't first choice.

Male students were more positive, than female, may be because examples used in courses are more geared towards male audience, as feminist economists always stress(): 26.3% of males see courses as largely relevant compared to 23.4% of females.

Typical students' comments include: "It would be useful to see the relevance of certain topics more explicitly."; "Some modules could be made more relevant to the real world and current affairs."; "Apply Economics more to real world, make subject more active learning".

Q19. How do you find the workload on this degree?

About two thirds of the respondents (66.1%) find their workload about right. At the same time one in five thinks that it is too heavy and one in thirteen that it is too light. There were differences in students' replies due to year of study, language, age and gender.



The majority of students (68.8%) from the first year see their workload as about right; but at the same time they include the biggest group that see their workload as being too light (9.8%). On the contrary, more than a third of postgraduates perceive their workload to be heavy (36.4%), compared to the rest of the years of study, where it is about 20.0%. In their comments students try to explain their perceptions: "Works

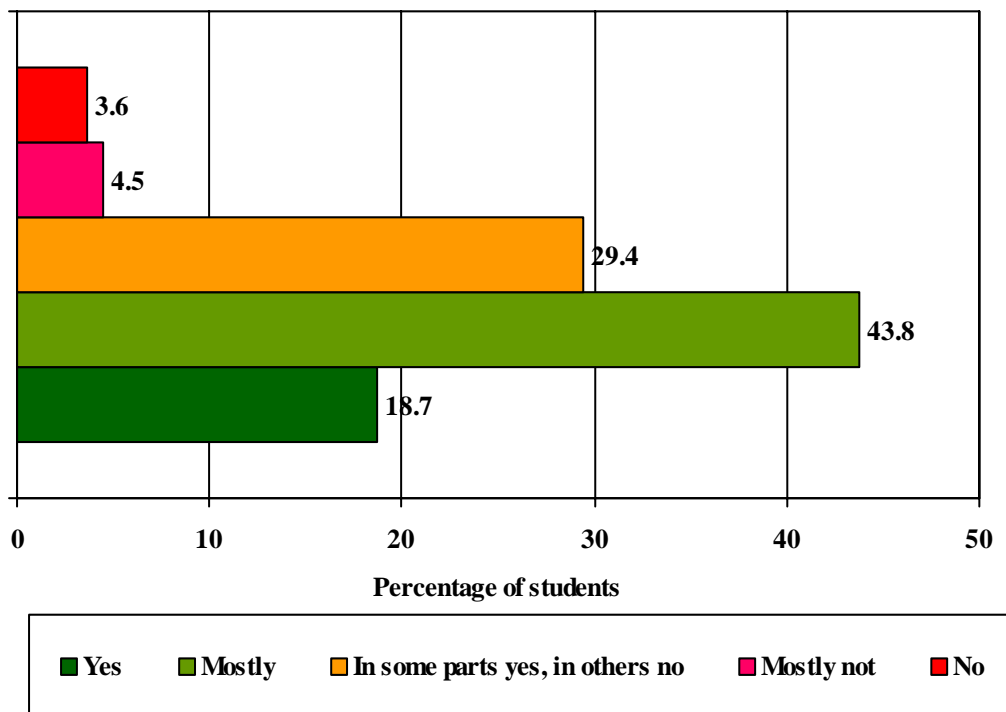
tends to come in lumps and needs to be handed in at similar times making it quite stressful.”; “In the first year it was very easy, and high grades were obtainable with little or no work. This has dramatically shifted in my final years.”; “Workload is not too much to pass, but to gain a good academic result is different.” Some students see heavy workload as a necessary part of a degree – “It’s really heavy, but that’s what I’m here for.”

Mature students find their workload heavier, than the other age groups: 36.8% see it as heavy, compared to 20.1% of 18–21 year olds and 27.1% of 22–25 year olds. As one of them write: “The workload is manageable, but having a family puts on additional strain.” This also could be due to the gap in their education and possible wrong expectation of workload in higher education.

Even though nearly the same proportion of males and females see their workload as about right, more females than males see it as heavy: 25.8% and 19.2% respectively.

In general native English speakers were more positive about workload than non-native English speakers: 71.6% of them see it as about right compared to 63.0%. Non-native English speakers have bigger group of students who thought that their workload was heavy – 27.3%, compared to 19.9% of native English speakers. The perception of the heavier workload could be due to the language problems they encounter – “Workload is stressful and too much.”

Q20. Do you find the assessment on your degree accurately tests the level of your knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes?



The next group of questions are dedicated to the assessment. We asked students’ whether the assessment in their degree accurately tests the level of knowledge and understanding, which types of coursework assessment are used in their degree and

what suggestions they could make on how the nature of assessment could be improved to provide a better test of learning and to help them in their learning.

The majority of respondents have positive attitudes towards their assessment. More than three out of five of them think that the assessment mostly accurately tests the level of their knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes. There were differences in students' replies due to their age, gender and first language.

Mature students of 26 and older were the most positive group: 27.4% of them answer 'Yes' to the question, compared to 18.7% of 18–21 year olds and 14.0% of 22–25 year olds. Only a quarter of them answered "In some parts yes, in others no", while it was 40.4% of 22–25 year olds and 28.1% of 18–21 year olds.

Females were slightly more positive in their answers: 63.5% versus 61.6% of males answered 'Yes' and 'Mostly yes'.

Native English speakers were more positive than non-native English speakers: 64.2% and 58.1% respectively answered 'Yes' and 'Mostly yes'.

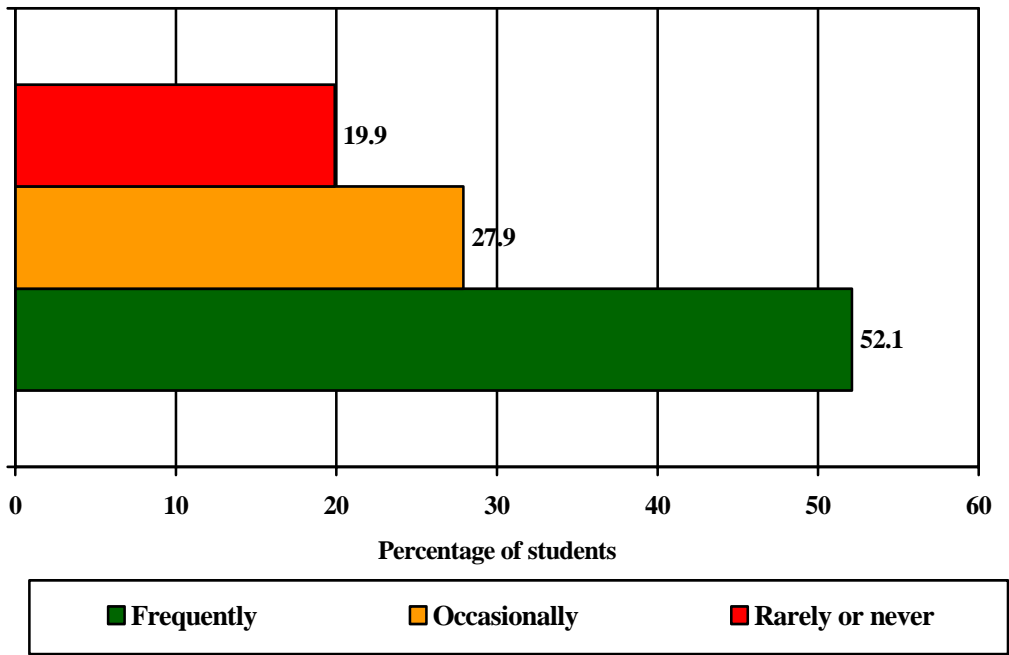
In their comments students clarify their perceptions: "Absolutely not, assessed marks are often unrelated to the level of work put in."; "All in all yes... we often get past papers which may reflect almost too accurately the upcoming ones... however.. it works wonderfully since you then learn the stuff you need to know."; "Assuming exams and essays reflect knowledge, yes, but many might be better at presentations or group projects."; "Coursework based on tests and multiple choice tests are a bad measure of understanding."; "In some cases yes, but in others no, I know people who are going to get 21s cos they have passed all the right exams, but ask them an applied question like us fed budget and haven't got a clue."; "Lack of coursework assessment means your memory and diligence is tested more than your ability to understand the subject."; "It does test the understanding but exams are often too short to allow you to display your full understanding so are really only useful as a ranking system."; "Should be more wide base... why do we have so little coursework based on so much. Lots and little works better."

Q20.a. Which of the following types of coursework assessment are used on your degree?

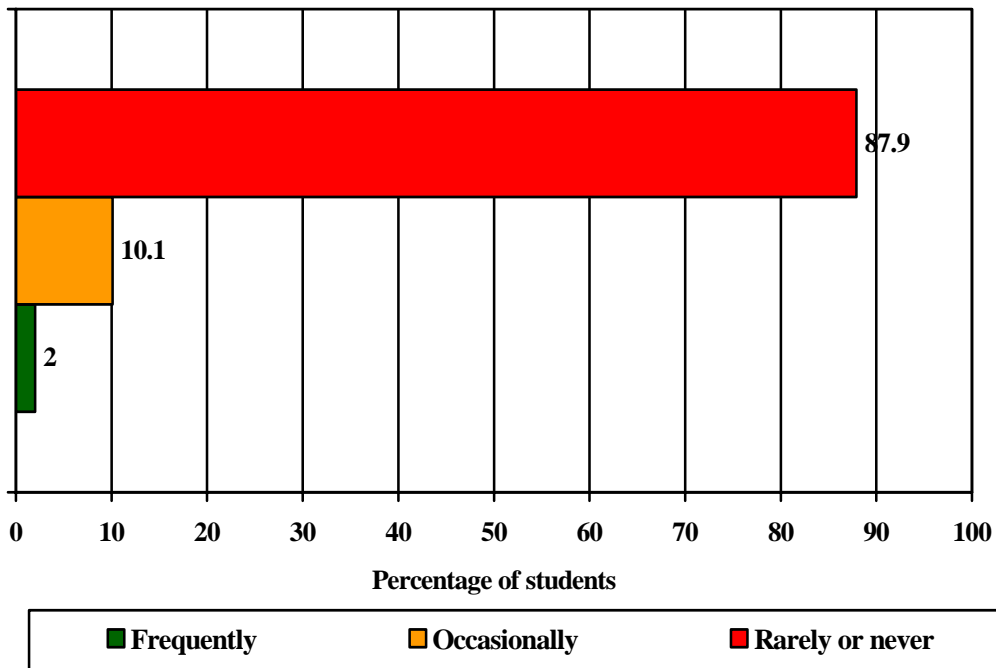
Q20.a.i. Essays in your own time

The majority of students use essays done in their own time frequently. At the same time it is rarely or never used by one fifth of respondents. There are differences in the way this type of assessment is practiced in different years of study. Students in the third (58.6%) and fourth (80.0%) year use it more often than students in the first (45.4%) and second year (52.6%). A third of postgraduate students rarely or never have this type of assessment.

Students' comments include: "Economics doesn't have enough non-assessed essays to give us practice."; "We should be evaluated more on how we can improve on essays that have been handed in."; "More essay-based coursework needed."



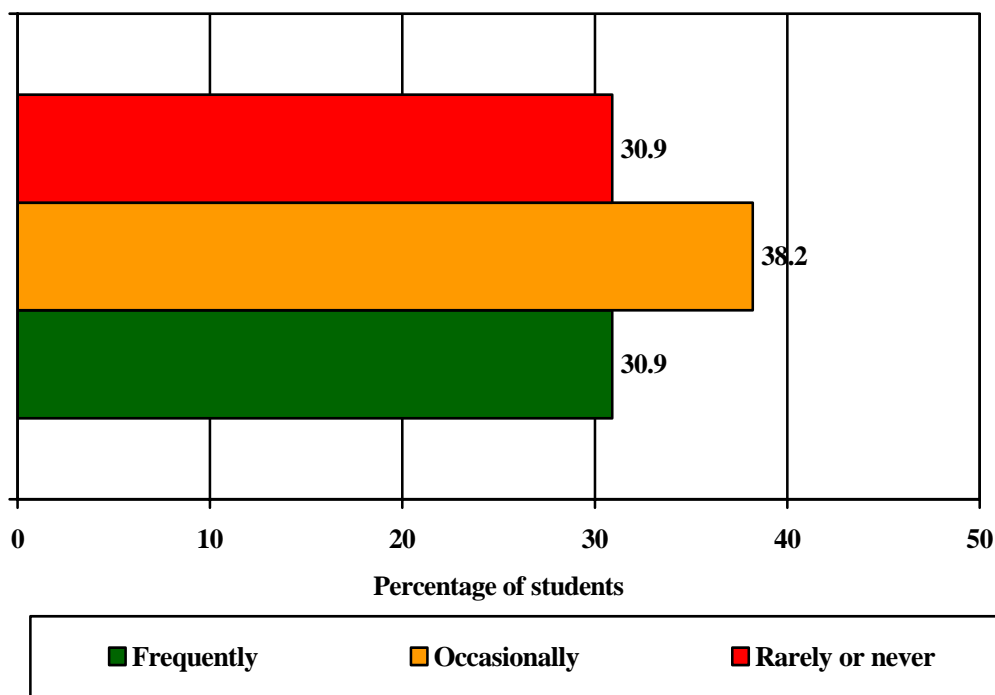
Q20.a.ii. Essays done in class



This is one of the rarest types of coursework assessment, as 87.9% replied that it is 'Rarely or never' used in their course. One in ten students has it occasionally and only one in fifty has it frequently. There were no differences in the way this type of assessment is used in different years of study. Students' comments include: "Exams usually contain essay sections."; "In first year, otherwise not."; "More time given in exams to write essays or reduce number of essays that must be written in 2 hours,

otherwise not enough time to do the question justice and must write so fast that handwriting becomes illegible.”

Q20.a.iii. Tests (as opposed to end of year/semester exam)



This type of assessment is used occasionally by 38.2% of respondents, while equal percentages of students of 30.9% use it ‘Frequently’ and ‘Rarely or never’. Tests are more frequently used in year one (34.9%) and year two (34.6%) and less in year three (21.9%) and four (22.2%). About a third of postgraduate students frequently have it.

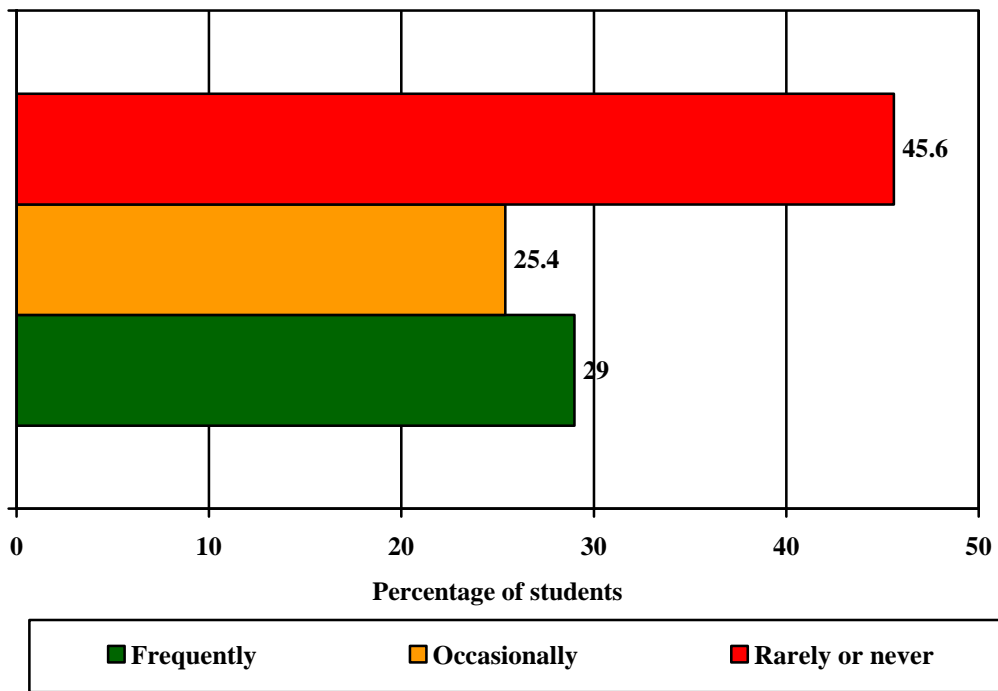
Students’ comments include: “More tests during the module instead of being tested on a lot of information at the end of the module.”; “Tests make you revise therefore are good for improving your knowledge, essays are very specific and therefore tunnel the subject area learnt.”; “More frequent tests of knowledge would ensure that students work consistently throughout the year and not just before exams or when essays are due.”

Q20.a.iv. Problem sets

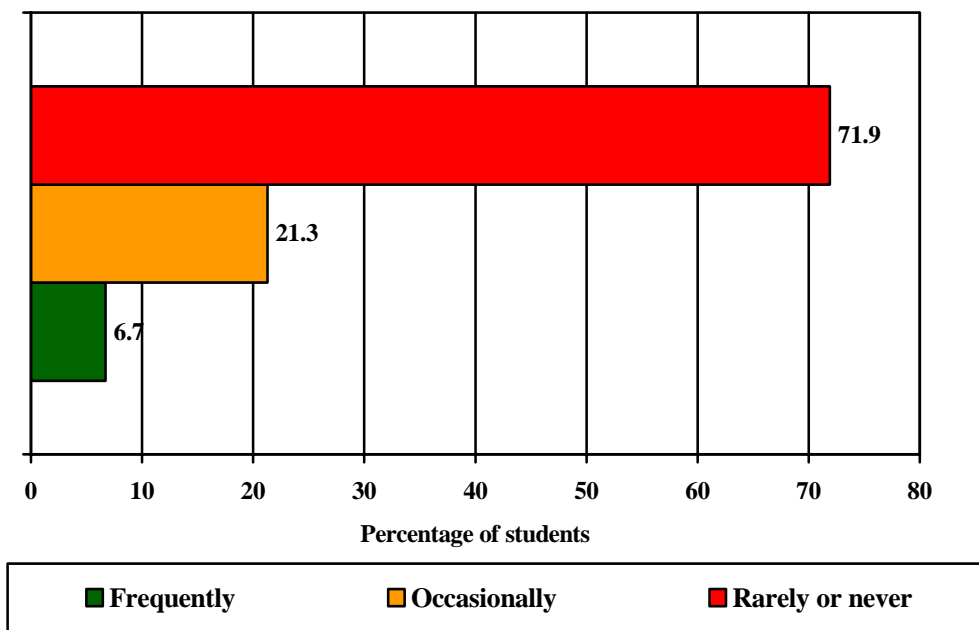
Problem sets are used frequently by 29.0% of respondents and another quarter use it occasionally, while the rest of 45.6% ‘Rarely or never’ have them. Problem sets are used more often in year one (31.1%) and year two (34.4%) and less often in other years of study. More than a half of third year students says that it is ‘Rarely or never’ used in their course.

Students’ comments include: “Problem sets should have a small participation in the assessment.”; “Less marks for problem sets since they are supposed to be a learning aid. More marks for group projects, since these tend to require a lot of organisation as

well as simply gathering content.”; “Problem sets presented in tutorial, where you are forced to be prepared.”

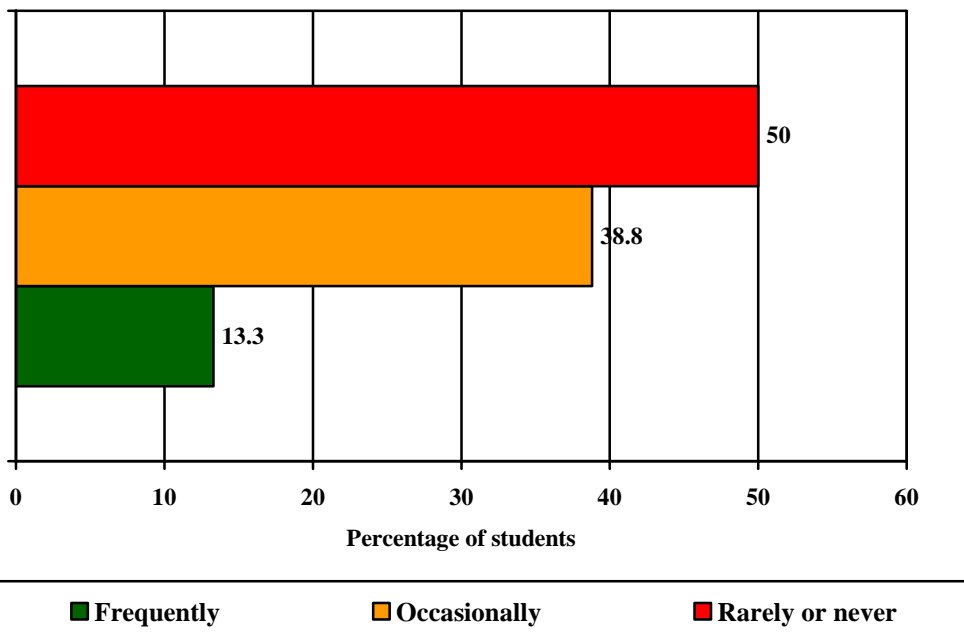


Q20.a.v. Online assessment



More than two thirds of respondents ‘Rarely or never’ have this type of assessment. It is used more often in year one, than in any other year: one in eight use it frequently and a quarter use it occasionally; more than 80.0% of students in year three, four and postgraduates ‘Rarely or never’ have it in their course. Students’ comments include: “Online assessments to be done outside term would be useful to check on understanding of the course content.”; “More online test with feedback and maybe an example of what a model answer would consist of.”; “In a module in previous years, online tests were set every couple of weeks. These were not assessed but were obligatory and helped enormously as it encouraged you to look over previous work and gave more practice questions. This was than marked and the assessment left up with practice questions to go over as exam preparation.”

Q20.a.vi. Group work projects



Half of respondents ‘Rarely or never’ have group work project assessment, while one in eight has it frequently and nearly two out of five have it occasionally. This type of assessment is used more often in year three (13.9% use it frequently) and four (13.9%), than in any other year. It is especially rare in postgraduate courses (8.4% use it frequently). Students’ comments about group work assessment include: “More group work projects in Economics modules will be better... so far my group work projects are all in Finance modules, which is Business School's.”; “Group project is a good learning source but should not be assessed largely as the mark depends on other students within the group that we have not chosen.”

20.b. How could the nature of assessment be improved so as (i) to provide a better test of your learning; (ii) to help you in your learning

Many students feel quite happy about the way they are assessed and suggest no or only small changes: “The assessment on my course is very good. We have assignments, mid term tests and end of term exams. Perhaps there could be additional verbal examination where you had to give a presentation.”; “I think there is no improvement needed.”; “The Economics dept has recently started a program of continuous assessment as well as end of year exam. This is excellent.”

As we asked students to reflect on the nature of assessment and provide suggestions for its improvement in two aspects, we divided their answers into 2 groups accordingly: how to provide better tests for knowledge and how to help them in their learning.

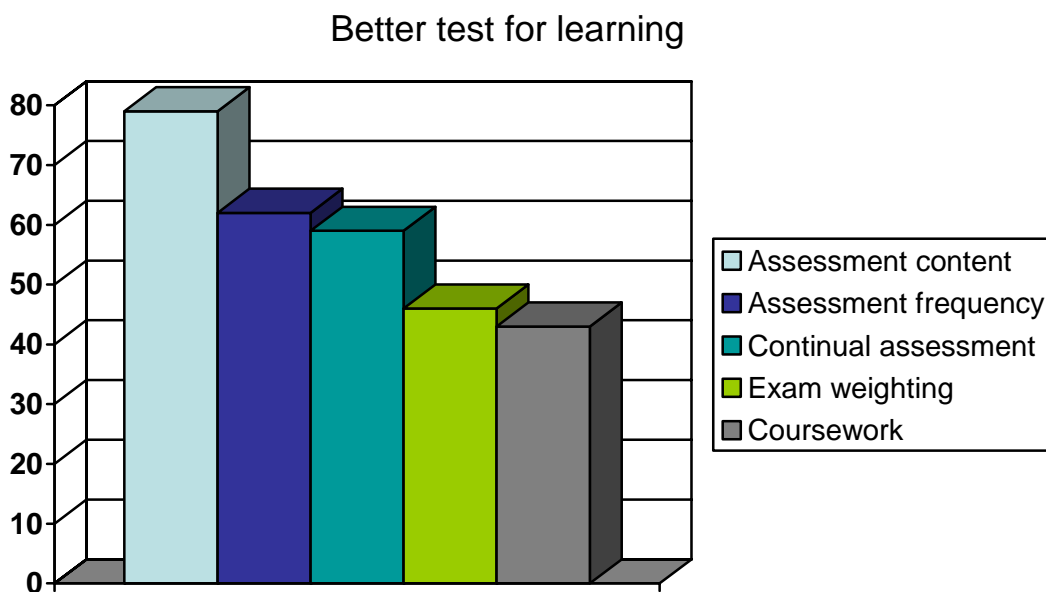


Figure 9 Coded responses for question 20b (i)

To provide the better tests of learning the students suggested that assessment should be more frequent and continuous, for example tests during the term-time and more frequent essays: “It would be better to have some exams during the year, rather than to have them all in a row.”; “More continuous assessment, both frequency and volume.”

The exams should not have 100% weighting on the mark: “Exams tend to be very narrowly focussed and don’t represent all material covered on the unit. Don’t feel exam marks are a fair representation of my knowledge.”

The introduction of assessed coursework is suggested. Continuous assessment can help to ensure that the student “is on the right track” and assessed coursework might reduce the level of stress associated with the exam: “Assessment should be broken down throughout year rather than one exam at year end. Improved feedback on projects and tests would stimulate improvement rather than just trying to meet the requirements for good marks.”; “I believe exams are an unrealistic method of assessment as it's unlikely that we will be stuck in a room for a few hours and made to

recite information from memory. Coursework is a far more realistic method because it tests whether we understand the information more than whether we can remember it which is far more important as we can always look something up in the real world.”

Some students, however, mention that they should be given a choice of the assessment type: exams or coursework, as some of them have a preference towards exams, because they test a wider range of knowledge, whereas some prefer coursework: “Thus those people who find it easy to work for a long duration will appear to do well relative to those who cannot. An exam is much better as a method of assessment as everyone is given the same amount of time to do the same questions. Group work is useful, but those who work hardest carry those who work least. However, any assessment done in your own time gives you a greater opportunity to learn. You can really cover in depth the material given instead of lightly covering everything.”; “A wider variety of assessment would help everyone, as some people may struggle with exams/assignments.”; “The variety in the way we are tested does help in improving different learning and revision skills. Essays can narrow the learning as you find yourself focus on only a few areas.”

Students also mention better preparation for an exam, rising awareness of what is expected of them: “Assessment can be made clear to ensure that students know what is expected of them and mentioning this either in seminar or lecture could raise awareness.”

Improve learning process

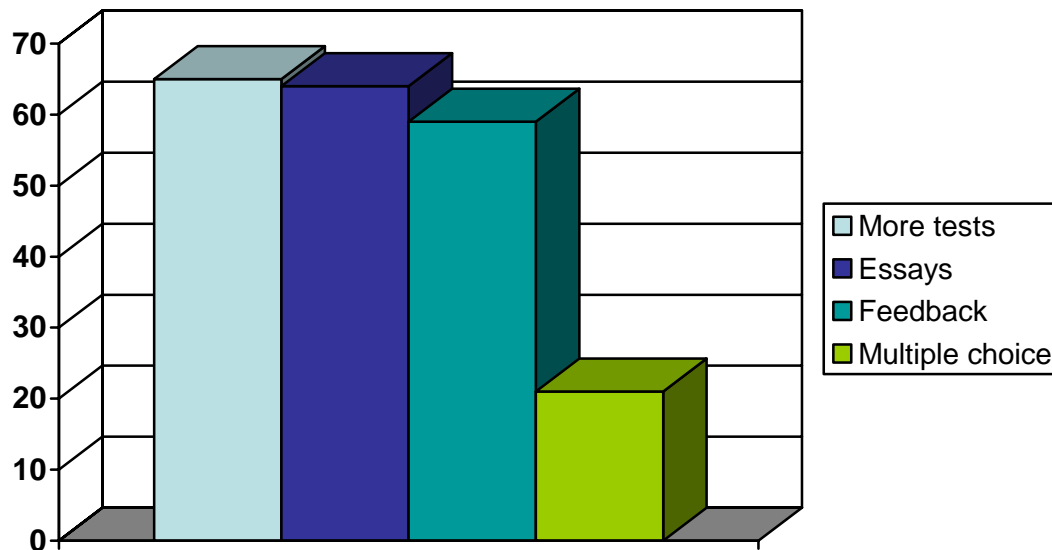


Figure 10 Coded responses for question 20b (ii)

For an assessment to help improve students learning respondents suggest more frequent tests, more essays and better feedback. The students comment on the lack of feedback on the exams and coursework and long waiting time to get the marks. The feedback would help students to learn from their mistakes.

Remarks about group projects express the idea that group work does not allow to “monitor individual student’s ability”. There are quite a few comments on assessment of group projects being ineffective and sometimes unfair.

Feedback about assessment content is “make it relevant to the real world.” Students suggest that introduction of different types of assessment (tests, essays, coursework, exams) will motivate them to learn more.

There are a few comments about the timetable for the exams, students’ remark that the exam schedule is too tight, and the exams should be more spread out.

Q21. What Economics software is used on your degree? Q21.a. Please comment on how useful you have found the use of software

The next group of questions are dedicated to the use of information technology in Economics education. We asked students what types of Economics software are used in their degree and invited comments on its usefulness. We also asked if their degree makes use of VLEs and how effective they are in supporting their learning. We also invited their comments on how this effectiveness could be improved. This question was answered by nearly half of the respondents.

Students’ comments on the usefulness of Economics software should be considered in conjunction to their answers on what software is used in their degree.

1,665 respondents answered these questions and 36.6% of them said that they didn’t use any Economics software in their degree course. The majority of those who use Economics software use E views (24.0%), STATA (19.5%), SPSS (14.3%), WinEcon (9.2%), Minitab, Microfit, software from online workbooks and other unspecified software (sometimes VLEs are mentioned).

The majority of students find the use of Economics software on the course useful, though some students complain that not always enough explanations were provided.

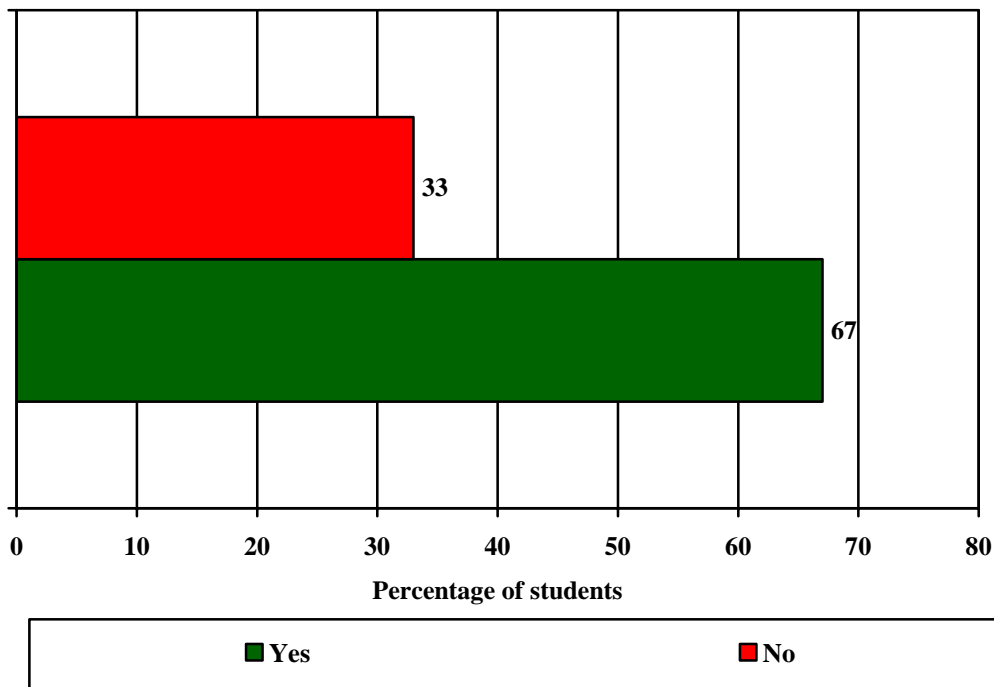
Among the comments on Win Econ: “It is first years life saver.”; “Useful, but teachers shouldn’t rely on it too much.”; “There are some online tests, and some summary for each topic – which I found quite useful.”; “Very useful for world related exercise.”

Comments on E views: “Has helped with the understanding of various econometric measures and their meaning in economic concepts.”; “Very useful, although I would have liked to be taught to properly use them instead of occasionally using them in the way the teacher said.”; “It is really useful, runs regressions much better than other software.”

Comments on STATA: “Very useful for the analyses of microeconomic data.”; “Fairly difficult to use, although you can apply statistical theory well using it.”; “It is very useful, but hard to understand as a beginner.”

Students’ general comments on the use of software include: “Introducing Economic soft wares to student would be ideal.”; “I think they should reduce course material from all modules and introduce soft wares used in investment, accountancy, and related business industries because every employer is looking for graduates with basic knowledge of the software used like Sage for accounting, Bloomberg, Style Research, Thomson One Banker and Datastream for investment.”

Q22. Does the modules /units on your degree course make use of a “Virtual learning environment” (VLE), such as Web CT or Blackboard?



Two thirds of the students use VLEs in their degree, while one third doesn't. There are differences in the way various models/units make use of VLEs due to the year of study. It's use diminishes from the first year (73.8%) to the second year (68.9%) and all the way to postgraduate courses (56.1%).

There were also statistically significant differences in the student's answers due to their age. Mature students of 26 and older however reported less positive – only 57.3% of them use a VLEs in their course, compared to 67.5% of 18–21 year olds and 69.3% of 22–25 year olds. It could be that higher proportion of mature students attend universities which don't use VLEs in teaching, but this may be also due to a lower level of computer literacy of the mature students, an issue already discussed in this report.

Q22.a. If your course uses a VLEs, comment on how effective you have found it in supporting your learning and how the effectiveness could be improved?

This question was answered by nearly half of the respondents. Students consider VLEs to be effective tools, but the overall opinion is that it is not utilised enough – “It's as effective as lecturers make it. Some put the whole course on there – that's very useful. Others put a reading list up and that's it.” Some lecturers are able to make better use of it by posting additional information and encouraging discussions, whereas others use it only as a resource for downloading lecture slides.

The potential benefit of VLEs is that it provides access to a wealth of information needed by students; materials posted there improving understanding of the subject and

enhancing communication between tutors and students and within the student groups. Among the comments: “VLEs gives us a better idea of what we actually know, not what we thought we knew.”; “I have found it very useful to back up my notes and enhance my understanding.”; “Lecture notes, model seminar problem answers, suggested reading and discussion forums online all support learning well. Online assessment is a mixed blessing. It’s quick and easy but there is little room to get 'working marks' for any technical answers.”

VLEs are also used as a tool for contacting tutors, though students’ experience in this area varies: “Good way to communicate with lecturers useful as everything you need is in one place!”; “If we have problems we can email teachers for help, however it does mean we don’t get the one on one support we need as some tutors have ridiculous office hours and do not email back for days. It could be improved by having feedback for students so we know how well we are doing.”

Students suggest improving the effectiveness of VLEs by their more active use. Among the comments about VLEs: “It is very effective as it allows you access to past lecture slides and other notes and discussions.”; “Website – lectures slides etc. Extremely useful: can prepare beforehand and can adapt your own notes.”; “Very useful as can see answers to work set for workshops and can talk to others about any problems your having.”; “Useful as recommended readings are available for download. Lecture handouts could be posted on Black Board as well.”

Students’ suggestions for improvement include: “It has been effective in providing lecture and other materials. Further to this there is no other use. Improvements could be made through making use of other tools, such as discussion boards, possibly with lecturers allocating sometime for an online questions and answer session, but also for students to be encouraged to use discussion boards, as they are left unused.”; “Only used for some modules. Would prefer more discussion boards.”; “I found this very effective, but would have found it more so had ALL lecturers posted lecture material online for you to print out before the lecture, to save having to concentrate on writing notes down, and enabling you to listen to what they're saying more.”; “It would be more effective if there was a discussion board so we could discuss issues arising with other students.”

About 5% of respondents complain about the use of VLEs in their department: “It is poor. Need better communication about what it is, and how to access it.”; “Some lecturers don't give any handouts, we just have to go on Web CT to find them.”; “I would say in terms of my learning it hasn’t provided me with any educational benefits apart from providing access to lecture notes.”; “Blackboard, provided lecture noted and that is about it.”

Q23. What career do you hope to follow?

1,085 respondents answered this question. The majority of the respondents reported to have decided on their future career path, although some are still undecided.

The majority of students aspire to follow a career in finance or finance-related services, including Investment banking, Insurance, Accountancy, Audit and Corporate Finance.

Some students expressed an interest in following a career in Economics, joining the academia, teaching Economics, doing a PhD in Economics. There is also an interest in

becoming involved in Economics forecasting and working in the development Economics.

There is also an interest in following a career in business, including Marketing, Management, and Consultancy as well as starting their own business.

Some students would like to join the Government and work in an Economics-related position in the civil service or to work with humanitarian aid organisations.

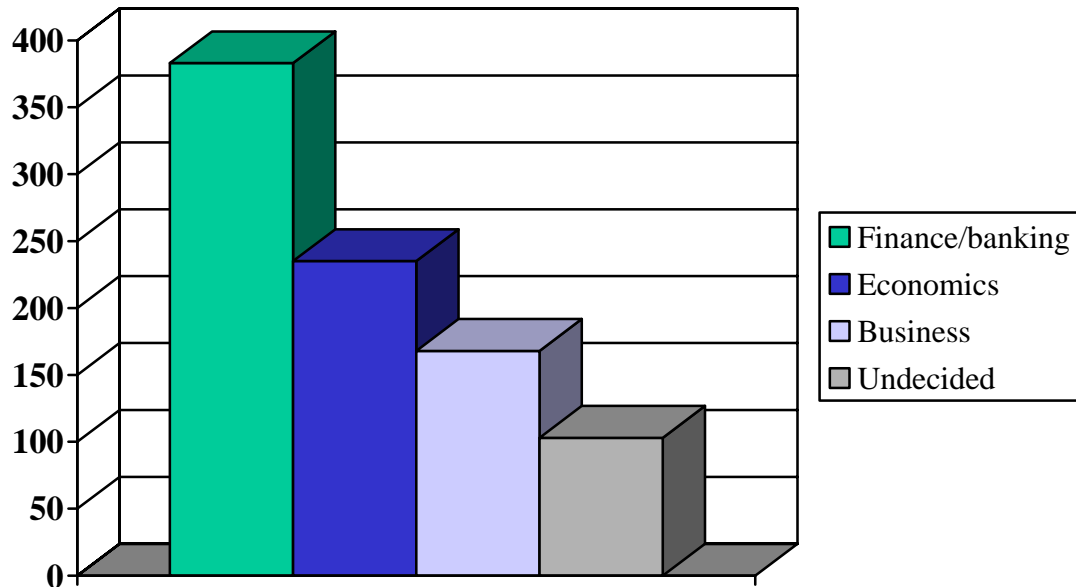


Figure 11 Coded responses for question 23

Q24. What skills have you developed by studying for your degree that you feel will be useful to you in your career after you have graduated?

All the respondents answered this question and mention at least two types of skills that they developed during their degree course. There are a wide variety of skills that the students have developed. These skills can be subdivided into three broad categories: Interpersonal, Academic and Practical.

Interpersonal skills include enhanced communication skills and group work skills. Students also report that they have acquired time-management, self-study, multi-tasking and organisational skills, which they think will be useful in the future.

Students also report on having developed the academic skills that are related to their study: knowledge and understanding of specific subjects as well as analytical and critical thinking. Essay writing skills, research and study skills are also mentioned as important by students. Numerical skills are mentioned in terms of allowing the application of knowledge in the real world.

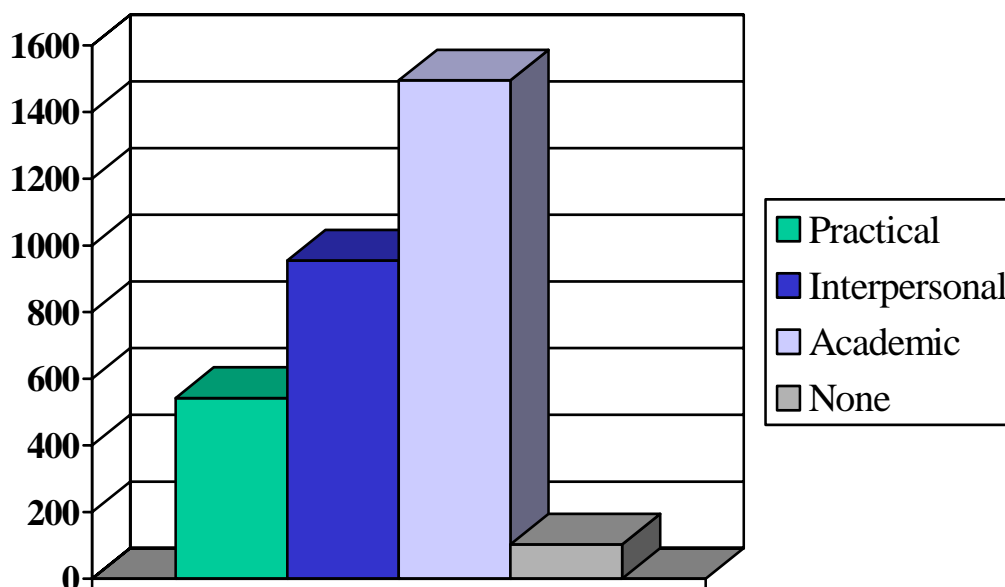


Figure 12 Coded responses to question 24

Students also stress the practical skills gained during their course. They include: decision-making, knowledge of the business world and discursive skills. Students consider the mastering of a specific software use and mathematical techniques as very relevant skills. Some students stress that studying on this degree has increased their self-confidence and motivation as well as help their language skills.

Only about 5.0% of respondents reply that during their degree course they haven't developed any additional skills.

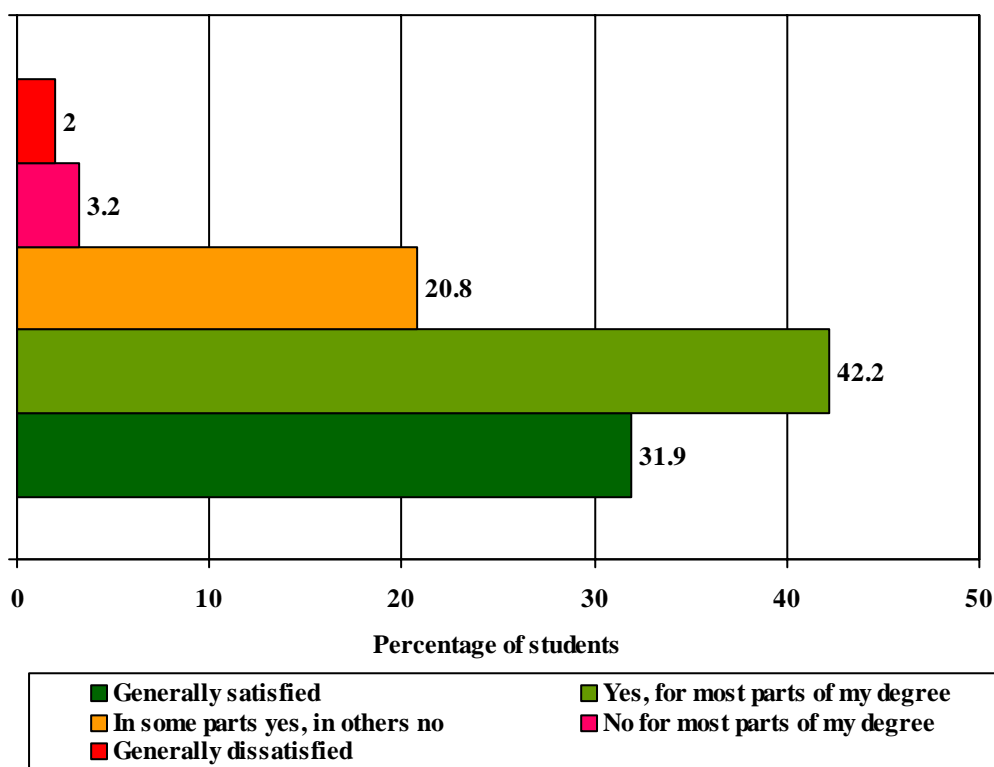
Q25. Overall, are you satisfied with the quality of this degree course?

Nearly three quarters of respondents are satisfied with their degree course, which is similar to the results of the National Students survey and to the results of our previous surveys.

There are differences in students' responses due to their age, gender, A-level Maths and first choice of degree.

Mature students of 26 and older are more generally satisfied with their course, than the rest of the students: 44.4% compared to 31.3% of 18–21 year olds and 29.4% of 22–25 year olds. This may be due to higher motivation of mature students, their understanding of the benefits of the degree course and more realistic expectations of it.

Students, who have Economics as their first choice of degree were more satisfied with the degree course, than those for whom it wasn't first choice: 76.3% versus 63.8%. The reasons for this could be similar to the ones of the mature students – higher motivation and realistic expectations.



Students with A-level Maths got higher satisfaction from their degree, than those without A-level Maths: 76.6% and 69.5% respectively. As some degree courses were more challenged and reported being more disappointed as a result with the whole experience of Economics higher education. Probably some departments could be more open about prerequisite requirements for the course and highlight possible challenges. In their comments students stress various positive and negative aspects of their degree course: “Generally well taught, some particularly inspiring units, good support from lecturers, good library facilities. Units met their aims and objectives.”; “Very very satisfied, this is one of the best Economics department.”; “Not dissatisfied but feel that easily more could be done to improve it.”; “I find some of my lecturers aren’t very interested in teaching us and as a result produce uninteresting lectures.”;

“I am happy that I will gain my degree and to say no would be to take a lot of credit away from a few very high quality lecturers, but generally the teaching standards are poor.”

Q26. Are there any aspects of your course that you do not like?

Some students report that there are no aspects of the course that they dislike or they dislike a specific subject or prefer one subject to another.

However, this question mainly elicited negative remarks from the students. Dislikes concern the teaching methods of lecturers, structure and content of courses, Maths aspects and group sizes, as lecture groups are too big, and students prefer small group tuition. Lecturers and tutors “sometimes are more interested in their research than in teaching.”; “I’m sure the course could and would have been a lot more interesting if

there were better lecturers and tutors who make a dry subject like Economics enjoyable.”; “The tutors are generally very poor. They don't seem passionate about

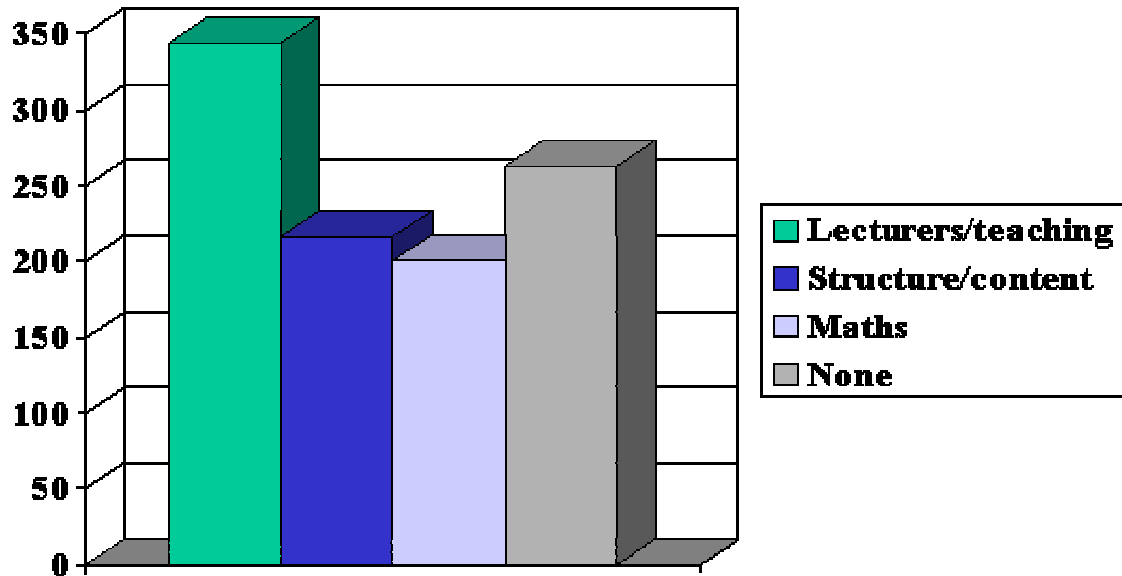


Figure 13 Coded responses to question 26

the subject, they don't seem to want to begin discussions, and they generally seem quite bored. This rubs off on the students and we end up feeling the same.”; “Some lecturers quite incompetent or hard to understand. This ruins my enjoyment of lectures.”

Some of the content seems to be boring, uninteresting and old: “The quality and content of modules can vary greatly and some material can frankly, at times, be rather archaic in their style and content.”; “Some areas of knowledge are spoon fed, while others lack a bit of clarity.”; “The course is largely theory based in the 2nd Year. I would prefer more practical/applied modules.”; “In terms of content, only the fact that even 3rd year study seemed quite a long way behind the cutting edge.”; “One course has photocopied notes from the early 1980s that need serious revision.” Students bring suggestions on how the content could be improved – “Economics tends to neglect the most poor. Perhaps opening eyes to the poorest may help enhance awareness of the need to strive for better equality, perhaps through a more sustainable economic root. Perhaps we need a shift in the current economic paradigm.”

Students do not see the application of the knowledge to the real world: “Sometimes the work is all theory and too abstract and doesn't relate to real life.”; “Some Economics classes just don't seem to apply to real life at all and it took me until my Fourth year to see a link. I am enjoying my Fourth year choices and feel that if classes could be more like this throughout the degree students would learn and understand Economics more rather than just cramming for exams and learning nothing in the long

term. I feel that this long term learning would also be facilitated by having more testing throughout the year, whether that be online or in class.”

Also they do not get enough practical exercises. Again, there are remarks about the English of some tutors and the lack of support and feedback on the assignments. There are also remarks about teaching becoming too impersonalised.

There are 200 remarks on the difficulties of learning Maths and stats, as the level of these subjects is too hard for some students: “The way Maths is taught doesn't take into the account that most people do struggle with it.”; “The Maths parts including econometrics are my favourite yet the teaching does not give them justice, and therefore my study is mainly done outside of lectures.” Others feel that they are not stretched enough – “We should have more subjects, more hours for seminars. Teachers should demand more from us. Should make us think, not only learn the theories. I do not like the fact that people who were not doing Maths in the college are accepted for that course. They make our course slower as they do not understand basic algebra.” There are some remarks about group work; this aspect of the course is not liked by some students, because of the problem of free-riding and the obligation to work with people they do not want to work with.

The choice of modules is also not satisfactory, according to the opinion of some students.

There are many comments on the way exams are set up, including the use of marking scheme and weighting of the exams or essays towards the overall mark: “Sometimes you don't get good understanding of subject just the ability to pass an exam.”; “Some exams rely too much on written skills and memory whereas students should be assessed on the levels of understanding.”; “I just feel that it was too much orientated to passing exams, and relatively little on enjoying your subject or applying it.”; “Some modules are a lot tougher than other. There are sometimes large differences in weighting for marks. i.e. an 1500 word essay in one module may be worth 10% where as a 2000 word essay in another is worth 50%. it gives other students an advantage. Especially as they need only complete one 2000 word essay for 50% where as me and my colleagues have to complete two 1500 word essays for a total of 20%.”

Q27. Please identify one or two aspects of your degree course that could be improved and say why

More than half of respondents replied to this question. The majority of the comments concern teaching and lecturers. Students would like to see interested lecturers, better explanations of the material less language-related barriers. The main complaint is that an already difficult subject is made harder by the language barrier. “I feel that the quality of the course is compromised by some foreign lecturers that are unable to fully explain the complexities of certain aspects of some modules.”, writes one student. Another names, as an aspect of the course that he dislikes “Lecturers who do not have a good grasp of the English language. It sounds harsh but it really does inhibit our ability to engage/concentrate in lectures and be able to interact with lecturers and understand what is being taught.”

When asked what could be done to improve their learning, students very often suggest “More English teachers.” One elaborates: “My current macroeconomics seminar tutor

is a postgraduate student who the class have difficulty understanding. He doesn't demand any interaction, perhaps because he is not confident with his speech, and students are happy to sit through mini-lectures where contribution and interactivity is kept to a minimum. There is nothing wrong with postgraduate tutors per se, but effective communication is vital.”

Accent, as part of the language barrier, is often mentioned: “Foreign lecturers are not a problem... I’m a foreign student myself...but lecturers with indecipherable accents who struggle speaking in English serve absolutely no purpose.” This problem is aggravated when there is a clash of accents between students and lecturers, like European and Asian accents. This exacerbates the problem of learning a new academic terminology: “The professional words in the course which I even can't find from my dictionary. This makes it difficult to understand the course for international students.”; “I am a international student, so the lecturer's good standard English pronunciation is very important for me. So I like local lecturers.”

The other issue mentioned by students is misunderstanding by non-English lecturers of the UK education system and the level of knowledge one can expect: “Lecturers have often had a poor grasp of English, as well as the English school system. This has meant they have not understood the level of mathematics some students have. Students without A Level need DEDICATED help, and more time to learn many concepts.”

Even though our survey was conducted with Economics students, we presume that it is an important issue for other disciplines as well and needs to be addressed at the university level. We have included advice for international class teachers in our Handbook for Economics Teaching Assistants, available from

<http://www.Economicsnetwork.ac.uk/handbook/gta/>

Students advocate the introduction of smaller groups and more tutorials; that would allow for better understanding of the material and practising with problem-solving sets: “To include greater seminars or even to encourage a greater amount of discussion on topics and application.”; “More group interaction to ensure that all members of the class have the same access to information.”; “Seminar groups need to be smaller in math subjects, and need to be put into sets of ability early on.”

Essays were suggested instead of multiple-choice tests for coursework assessment “Because it enables you to learn the topic in more detail, it helps in preparation for exams and it tests you in a different way to just being examined.”; “More emphasis on essays and coursework rather than exams, more discussions on ideologies and points of view. Also more interdisciplinary courses for everyone.” Other suggestion on the assessment to improve learning include – “More tests (on a weekly basis) this would help to promote active learning, motivate the students to study more, help with understanding of each part of the course, would make the course easier to digest – smaller chunks and more of a focus on each part providing an overall strong understanding and knowledge of the subject. Would also decrease cramming before exams and result in students actually retaining long term their knowledge and understanding of the course to build on. In addition lecturers and tutors would be able to monitor learning and be able to key in on problem areas quickly for the class as a whole and greatly improve the success of the class as a whole. Thus more students would graduate with higher grades and improve the status of the university.”

Some students comment that they are unable to choose the modules they think are relevant to their future career. Comments on timetable include days too packed with lectures.

There are some comments on the lack of feedback, supervision of progress and support from the lecturers.

Comments on course content mostly mention lack of reference to the real world; the students would welcome the ideas on how the knowledge that they get from the course is applied in life. “Some modules could be made more relevant to the real world and current affairs” – a student reports.

There are two types of comments regarding workload: some students think the workload is light: “I think the course should stretch students more” , others consider it too heavy: “It is really exhausting and almost de-motivating because there is so much work to be done” .

PhD students suggest “I’d have liked a little more guidance with my dissertation. Some of the new rules they’ve instituted this year – such as only allowing 90 minutes of total contact time over the year – seem so wilfully draconic that they’re hard to believe.”

Q28. How has the course changed you?

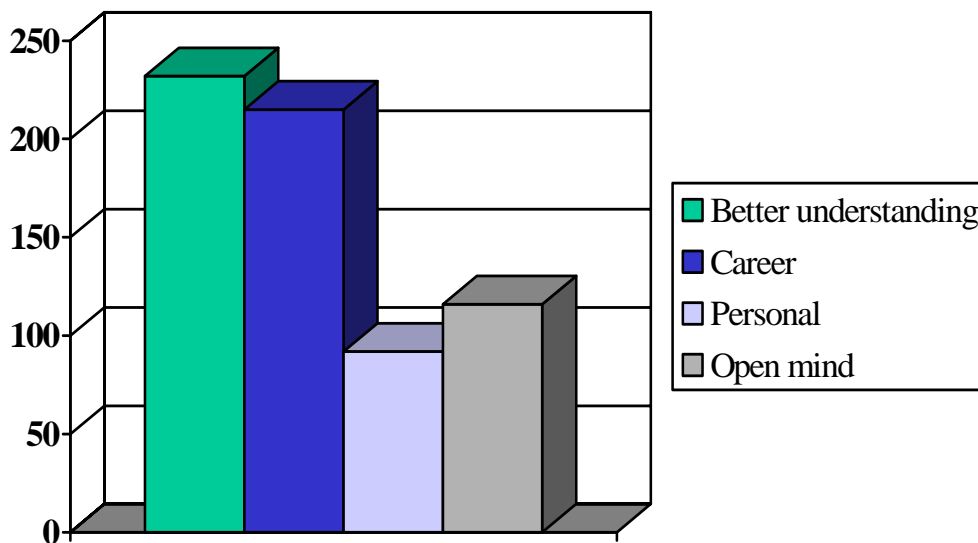


Figure 14 Coded responses to the question 28

More than half of respondents answered this question. There are both positive and negative comments to this question.

On the positive side, the students mention that the course gave them the clear career direction, a “more positive outlook on my future career path.” The course strengthened the career aspirations for some students and enhanced their understanding of life in general, gave insight into the “Economics issues in the world” and clarified “how business world works” .

The course increased awareness about how economy of the country works, allowing them to understand the decisions of the government – “It has made me consider the economic implications of actions taken by people. For example government policy and my views on issues such as international trade.” This allows students to have a “well-informed opinion” on different Economics-related issues. The students also understand the importance of Economics and its effect on the society. “Made me realise that the economy is far more complex than first thought but has enhanced my view on a career in finance.”; “For the better. I look at everything in the world, and think Economics. It changes the way you think, into a more rigorous analytical mindset.”; “It has helped me understand more the reasons for economic problems facing the world, and has given me more knowledge which are very valuable in life.”

Students mention the changes to their skill sets: the course taught them to work hard, to be determined in reaching their goals, be independent learners, as well as developing critical skills, thoughtfulness and improved problem-solving abilities: “My knowledge of the world has been enriched, career choice – previously was very pro a big multinational firm – now not so inclined to that career choice, perceptions of the world – realised there is a lot more to it than just western ideas etc.”

The course encourages students to follow chosen career paths: “The course itself hasn’t changed me as a person much, but it has broadened my horizons and helped me realise what I want to specialise in, where there’s room for more research.”

Many students stress that their degree course taught them not just Economics but show the whole complexity of issues: “It showed me that through Economics one can learn a lot about psychology, behaviour, sociology and philosophy as well – I started to think more in these terms as well and not just concentrate rigidly on the economic side of the issues.”; “I think about things differently. Thinking of life in an occasionally amoral way, and in terms of opportunity cost (for example) changes perspective.”; “I have developed the attention for the a bigger picture when it comes to issues of the world. Economics turned out to help me understand how the world works in fields of politics, sociology, world Economics, business and even psychology.”

Some students report that the course has not changed them at all.

On the negative side, there are comments that the course made students understand that Economics is not the right choice for them or that they prefer other subjects to Economics. The course has put some students off following a career in Economics, while others praise it: “It made me realise that there’s a great deal of pleasure in actually understanding something.”; “It has made me grow up a lot. I now feel readier for the ‘real’ world.”; “I have new plans for the future that I would not have entertained before uni.”

Q29. Where do you think you will be in five years after finishing your Economics course?

940 respondents answered this question. Similar to the career path section, students report on their aspirations to become managers in financial institutions and work in the City or develop a good career in any field, some mention acquiring a well-paid job or working as an economist in a public or private institution.

Some students would like to work abroad, or continue their education at Master's or as PhD students. There are several people who see themselves in family surroundings, and some mention developing a career in business as their choice.

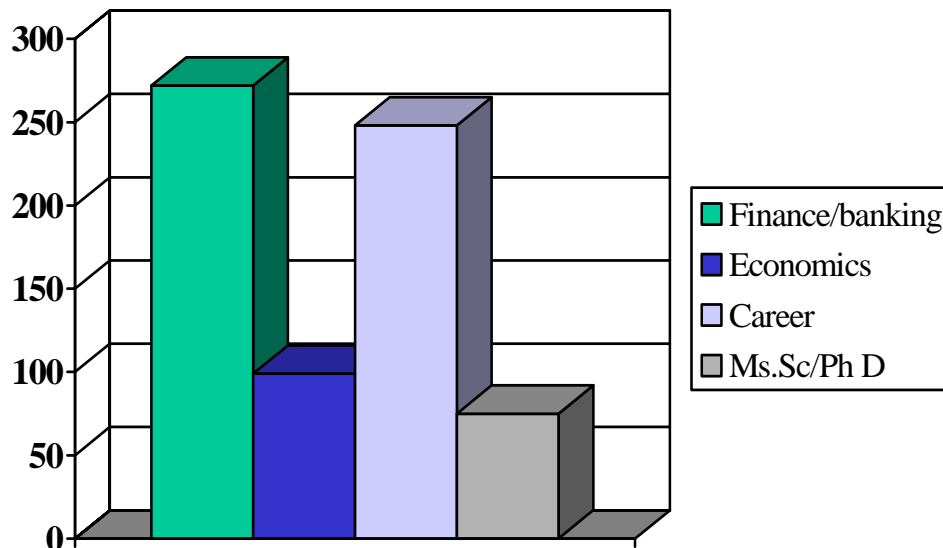


Figure 15 Coded responses to the question 29

Q30. Any other comments

We offered this question to respondents to allow them to express any other concerns about their Economics education. We were very surprised to receive many ‘Thank you’ replies for organising the survey, praising the quality of questions asked and reflecting on how the answers could be used in the pursuit of better Economics education for future students. This contrasted sharply with the complaints about the length of survey in the previous surveys.

“Only to thank you for allowing me to express my views.”; “This has been a very good questionnaire. Thanks.”; “I like the survey, very well organised questions, it covers all the problems.”; “I enjoyed filling in the survey.”; “This survey has made me more aware of the satisfaction I’m getting from my course.” “I’m glad you are taking the time to think of our feelings, Economics is an important subject and I hope you can use this to improve the quality of the learning for future student.”; “Thank you for providing the opportunity to answer some quite insightful questions (for my own reflection if not for yours!!)”

Conclusions

We were impressed by the maturity of students' comments and by their awareness of teaching and learning issues in Economics. Their reflections show that they not only learn modules necessary for their degree but also open their minds to a wider perspective of the world. Students appreciate their teachers' knowledge of the subject, but they'd like improvements in the areas of delivery, motivation and confident use of the English language. Some of the things that students suggest require a lot of extra resources, like smaller class sizes and more contact time, while others could be achieved by relatively easy changes in practice, which the Economics Network would be happy to support.

All the acquired data is confidential and only aggregated national results are included in this report. Confidential reports will be sent to all participating institutions with more than 20 students' responses. Results from the previous surveys were used by some of the departments to improve their teaching quality. We hope that this survey will provide a helpful comparison for the future as part of the time series data for tracing significant changes and patterns in students' perceptions of learning Economics. The results of the survey are consistent with findings of our previous surveys and National Students Survey and HEPI report (4,12)

Survey respondents were predominantly male, aged from 18 to 21, with A-levels in Maths and Economics, with English as their first language and Economics being their first choice of course.

Students' responses to the quantitative survey questions are examined using standard statistical methods and differences in responses are sought due to gender, age on entry, year/level of study, A-level Economics, A-level Mathematics, English as first language and choice of the course. Relationships that are statistically significant at the 0.05 levels are discussed. Responses to each of the qualitative questions are coded and aggregated for analyses using N-Vivo software. In the report for illustrative purposes we include graphs, which are based on the codes, summarised in terms of their frequency and typical quotes from students' responses.

Three quarters of the students say the degree course has met their expectations. Those who answered negatively to this question were asked to explain in what ways the course differed from their expectations. Among the main themes highlighted, judging by the number of times this issue was mentioned, were Maths and A-level Maths, course content (and its relevance to the real world), level of teaching and support for students. "A lot more Maths than expected" is one of the most frequent comments. Another "Teaching quality is not as good as I expected."

Overall, about three quarters of respondents were satisfied with the quality of their degree course. Among the comments – "Very very satisfied, this is one of the best Economics departments."; "Not dissatisfied but feel that easily more could be done to improve it."

When asked how their course has changed them, many students gave positive replies – "For the better. I look at everything in the world, and think Economics. It changes the way you think, into a more rigorous analytical mindset;" or "It made me realise that there's a great deal of pleasure in actually understanding something."

Among the most frequently mentioned best aspects of the course are the quality of staff and lecturers, variety of modules to study and future job prospects. – "Some of

the lecturers are really good, they encourage you to learn and understand and are very good at explaining difficult concepts.” The answers are very similar to the ones given in the 2004 students’ survey. The quality of the teaching staff is given as a crucial factor in the students’ continuing satisfaction with the course – “Bad lecturers: should be trained. I am not choosing some of the modules next year specifically because of who is teaching them. The subjects interest me, but I don't think I could handle another year of these 2 particular lecturers.”

We gave students a list of activities, from formal lectures to informal work with other students, and asked which they find useful in supporting their learning. Most of the activities were rated “useful or very useful” by at least half the respondents. For a breakdown of these responses, see the full report. Majority of students are more reflective on their learning and very articulate about it. They recognise the problems staffs are facing with pressures of doing research and teaching large classes, but they also want their critical voice to be heard: “Better lecturers, who are able to speak eloquently so you can understand, especially seeing the amount of money we pay.”; “Lectures should be held by researchers that have an inclination for teaching. Lectures held by professors that are interested just in their own research are quite unuseful and unsatisfactory.”; “The lecturers could get more salary, therefore the strikes would stop and we would not leave any material out.”; “I believe that all lecturers should participate in some form of teacher training. This would benefit the students, as the lecturers will be communicating their ideas with a more patient approach and be able to express their ideas in different ways. This may help people who do not have conventional learning styles and increase the approachability of the lecturers.”

In seminars/tutorials/small classes, a vast majority go through pre-prepared problem sets or worksheets. At the same time more than 80% rarely or never have games, simulations, role-play in seminars. Those who do have them rate them highly: “I quite enjoy role-plays, exercises in class;” “Best activities – role play and games”.

When asked how the seminars could be improved, students suggest running seminars more frequently and interactively, making groups smaller and organising them according to the student’s ability levels, as well as changing the content/structure of seminars. The quality of teaching is mentioned very often, especially with respect to Graduate Teaching Assistants, where there are often issues around their English language and pedagogical skills: “Less of a language barrier with seminar teachers to provide a greater understanding.” Many students also stress that they do not have seminars in their second year, so “More of them would be a start!”

The issue of teaching Maths and stats for Economics students continues to be a controversial one. About half of the respondents find the teaching of Maths and stats in their course to be good, another third say ‘some good, some not so good’ while one in ten perceive it to be ‘poor’ and one in twelve to be ‘generally not very good’. A typical comment is “The quality of teaching of Maths and stats varies greatly in my course. There are lecturers from both end of the spectrum.”

A majority of respondents found the content of the degree largely relevant to the real world and the workload about right. Students also agree that the assessment on their degree accurately tests the level of their knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes. Among the different forms of assessment, essays in the student's own time is frequently used by the majority of respondents. Many students rarely or never encounter essays done in class (9 out of 10 say “rarely or never”), online assessment (7 out of 10) or group work projects (half of respondents say “rarely or never”).

A large group of students is not yet coming across e learning. One in five report that online learning using the Web is not available in their courses, while two fifths do not use Economics software and two fifths also do not use (unassessed) online questions or tests. Use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) is spread more widely: more than nine out of ten respondents have access to materials posted by the lecturer on a course VLEs or website. Students find VLEs useful and the only complaint they have about them is lack of interactivity: communication tools (e.g. discussion board) are not available to every third respondent. A typical comment – “It has been effective in providing lecture and other materials. Further to this there is no other use. Improvements could be made through making use of other tools, such as discussion boards, possibly with lecturers allocating sometime for an online questions and answer session, but also for students to be encouraged to use discussion boards, as they are left unused.”

When asked about aspects of the degree that could be improved, respondents again raise their concern with problems in teaching. They would like to see more interested lecturers, better explanations of the material, less language-related barriers. Among the comments: “Better lecturers that can hold your attention and make you look forward to your lectures.”; “Some lecturers just do not care, they won't help you with work and some seem annoyed when you go to them for help. Others are very helpful though.”; “The lecturers interest in teaching??”; “Hope this survey results will reach my teachers.”

One of the issues often mentioned by students is misunderstanding by non-English lecturers of the UK education system and the level of knowledge one can expect from the students. Even though our survey was conducted with Economics students, we presume that it is an important issue for other disciplines as well and needs to be addressed at the university level. We have included advice for international class teachers in our Handbook for Economics Teaching Assistants, available from

<http://www.Economicsnetwork.ac.uk/handbook/gta/>

The results of the survey could be used by the departments along with other sources of information to reflect on their own practices. We have no intention for the survey to be used as a ranking exercise. Comparison of data between universities may be misleading, as students differ in terms of personal, educational and family backgrounds, which may have a profound effect on their perceptions of learning.

National results that are provided in the report could, nevertheless, be used as a benchmark for compared a department's own results.

We hope that this survey will not only provide the Economics community with useful information, but will play an important role in the improvement of teaching and learning in Economics. The Economics Network will be happy to provide workshops and advice to interested departments on the issues raised by the survey.

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